General Botha

The Career and the Man

BY

HAROLD SPENDER

An authoritative and remarkably interesting biography of the great Boer soldier and statesman, a man "as daring and swift in battle as he is wise and merciful in victory, as skilled a craftsman of peace as he is a master of war, as cunning in cure as he is potent in punishment." The book tells the story of his life from his birth in 1862 up to the second year of this present war, and closes with a graphic picture of his life to-day in South Africa.

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GENERAL BOTHA

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GENERAL BOTHA

GENERAL BOTHA

THE CAREER AND THE MAN

BY

HAROLD SPENDER

“ This is the happy warrior ; this is he
That every man in arms should wish to be ”—
William Wordsworth

WITH A FRONTISPIECE PORTRAIT AND FOUR MAPS

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FOREWORD

WHILE writing this book, I have felt all the time that it was in truth "war work." For what better work could one do in war-time than to mirror, as faithfully as one can, the actual figure and performance of a man like Louis Botha? One who is as daring and swift in battle as he is wise and merciful in victory, as skilled a craftsman of peace as he is a master of war, as cunning in cure as he is potent in punishment? For is not this the kind of ministry after which all the nations now crave—a surgery that binds together as well as cuts asunder, a cautery that heals as well as scorches? May the gods soon give us such in the Old World as in the New!

In collecting materials I have been deeply indebted to many helpers, but chiefly to Mr. and Mrs. R. Crawford Hawkin. Mrs. Hawkin is a sister of General Botha, and she is now domiciled in England. Thus she has been able to help me continuously, and she has never grudged any time or trouble. Of Mr.

Hawkin I need only say that he is now perhaps the closest student of South African affairs living in England.

I have also been greatly helped, for the period of their own Governorships, by Lord Selborne and Lord Gladstone: I have to thank Lord Milner for his kind courtesy and patience: and the Right Hon. Lewis Harcourt, M.P., lately Colonial Secretary, for advice and information.

From start to finish I have had the cordial and enthusiastic assistance of the Right Hon. W. P. Schreiner, K.C., ex-Premier of the Cape Colony and High Commissioner of South Africa; of the Colonial Office, always distinguished among departments by their courtesy and affability; the Colonial Institute, whose Librarian has spared no pains or labour; and the Empire Parliamentary Association, of 64 Victoria Street, S.W., a most valuable institution, especially fortunate in the possession of a skilful and devoted secretary, Mr. Howard d'Egville. Mr. John H. Harris, the secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society, has given me much aid in native questions.

I must also acknowledge a debt to many South African members of Parliament and soldiers visiting England this winter, including Senator the Hon. J. A. C. Graaff, Mr. Alwyn Vintcent, M.L.A., and Captain Meyler, now on active service; to Mr. Reinecke Van Stuwe, Assistant Military Secretary to Botha during the Boer War; and to several troopers from Botha's Defence Army, who have given me many valuable details of the Rebellion and the German War.

The books and blue-books used are in name legion. But I must pay a tribute to that wonderful monument of labour and devotion, the *Times* History of the War in South Africa" (6 vols., Sampson Low and Marston); and I owe a deep debt of gratitude to the files of the South African Press; especially to "South Africa" and the "African World."

I shall be always grateful for any new information sent from any quarter on the subject of this book.

HAROLD SPENDER.

12 HARRINGTON GARDENS,
LONDON, S.W., 1916.

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CHAPTER I

CHILDHOOD AND HOME

GENERAL BOTHA

CHAPTER I

CHILDHOOD AND HOME

> "Happy he
> With such a mother!"
> —TENNYSON.

LOUIS BOTHA was born on September 27, 1862, at Greytown—about fifty miles from Colenso, in Natal—at his father's farm, "Onrust." He was the eighth child and the third son in a family which in the end attained the respectable size of thirteen—by no means a rare or extravagant figure among the Dutch families of South Africa. Seven of these children were girls and six boys, and all of them were born on the Natal farm except the youngest, Marie.[1] They must have formed a large and cheerful community in that spacious and roomy South African farm-house where they were born and bred.

Louis Botha's parents were alike of mingled Dutch and French blood. The original Botha family, indeed, came direct from France and probably from Alsace-Lorraine. Three brothers, of a name akin to

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[1] Now married to Mr. R. C. Hawkin and living in England.

"Botha,"[1] are believed to have arrived in South Africa on one of the waves of that great migration which surged out of France after that great withdrawal of religious liberty which is known to the world as the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685). The remnants of the persecuted Huguenots rallied in South Africa with black thoughts against the land which had cast them out; and it was part of their revenge to place a fog of oblivion between them and the country of their origin. The religious persecutions of the Protestants in Europe were always vividly present in the memories of the older members of the Botha family. France was known to them as the country of the persecuting Catholics; and the French language was in consequence a thing of horror to the pious Calvinists of South Africa. The use of the French language was actually forbidden by law; and in consequence the French names were either changed or the pronunciation was completely altered.[2] But, in spite of an undoubted change of surname, there is a strong family tradition, probably correct, that the founder of the South African Bothas was one of these brothers, a captain in the French Navy, a man staunch to his faith, but of standing and wealth.[3]

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[1] Botte, Bode, or Boté. One of the Bottes came to England in 1688, and others went to South Africa. The name of Isaac Butt, the Irish leader, is said to have originally been Botte.

[2] Louis was pronounced "Leviss."

[3] The epaulettes of the uniform of a French naval officer were preserved in the family up to the present generation; and

The first clear human figure that emerges is Philip Rudolph Botha, born on August 22, 1749, who married on May 7, 1770, Elizabeth Fourie, a member of another Huguenot family. The Bothas and Fouries were at that time settled at the town of George in the eastern province of Cape Colony, four miles from the sea and thirty-two miles from Mossel Bay. They probably belonged to that group of Huguenots who had protested against the monopolies of the Dutch East India Company at Cape Town and moved eastward.

The Botha family remained in Cape Colony until the early nineteenth century. Eleven children had been born to those early Philip Rudolph Bothas. The eldest of these was probably the Botha who played a part in the Slagter's Nek rebellion (1815) and was compelled to witness those tragic hangings.[1] The third son, born in 1773, was Theunis Jacobus Botha. It is from him that General Botha is descended.[2]

In 1827 occurred one of those great movements among the Boers which were like the swarmings of bees

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Mrs. Philip Botha, senior, remembers that the family were possessed of many valuable French naval gold decorations when she married into it. The French Navy contained many Huguenots. The leader of the French emigrants to South Africa was a nephew of Admiral Duquesne, the head of the French Navy.

[1] See Mr. G. E. Cory's "Rise of South Africa," Vol. I., pp. 350-70.

The full pedigree is set out on page 27.

from a hive. This time it was the "trek" of the Cape Boers away from European rule into the unoccupied territory of Natal, where they vainly sought that freedom from State interference which was the haunting dream of their race. Among these migrants was Philip Rudolph Botha, the only son of Theunis, along with his two baby sons, the second of whom was named Louis. This son was destined to be the father of General Botha.

About half-way between Pietermaritzburg and Durban there is now a railway station called "Botha's Hill." It was in this neighbourhood that Botha's grandfather, old Philip Botha, settled and brought up his family. The little Louis had been born in 1826, and lived there with his father till he was twenty-one years of age. During that time he passed through troublous days of war; for the Boer settlers were placed between the Zulus and the British. On the one side—the north—the great Zulu army of Chaka was in process of formation. As cattle-lifting was an ordinary means of livelihood to those hardy and formidable warriors, constant vigilance was the only price of possession for these Boers who wished to keep their herds and flocks. Meanwhile, on the other side—to the south and east—was the still more menacing pressure of offended British majesty, peremptorily disputing by arms the claim to independence on behalf of the infant Boer Republic, which had been founded here in Natal by Pieter Maritz and his Voortrekkers.

In 1843 a wise British Governor, Sir George Napier, appointed a brilliant Cape Dutchman, Dr. Henry Cloete, to negotiate terms of peace between the Republicans of Pietermaritzburg and the British colonists at Port Durban. Cloete knew the Boer language, their religion, and their outlook on life. These he carefully respected; and it was owing to this foresight and his anxious attention to these matters that he was able so early and so easily to persuade the Natal Boers to accept the British flag.

One consequence of this success was that the Botha boys became British subjects, while at the same time preserving their religion, their language, and their customs.

At the age of twenty-one Louis Botha the first, the second son of Philip Botha the third, moved to Greytown, at that time the remotest civilised spot in this part of South Africa, just on the borders of the wildest part of Zululand.

Here Louis married Minnie Van Rooyen, the daughter of Gerhardt Van Rooyen, a substantial farmer of good lineage, and also allied in blood to the French Huguenot family of Leroux. Minnie Van Rooyen was seventeen years of age and the beauty of Greytown.[1] The old folk still speak of that prize of the town, the handsome, elegant, refined young girl who was won by the determined young pioneer—not a man to accept a refusal.

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[1] As a baby girl she had helped her mother to make bullets within the laager while the Voortrekkers defended themselves against the furious Zulu onslaughts.

A strenuous life opened for these young people at Greytown—wars with Kaffirs, hardships innumerable, adventures all the time. Their lightly built settlers' home was burned down several times over their heads, by Kaffirs or by sparks from the great kitchen fire. All around were savages and wild animals. It is recorded that on one occasion this Louis Botha met a lion face to face, and, having no weapon in his hand, stared the animal into flight by sheer force and fixity of his gaze. It was during this life at Greytown that twelve children were born to them, including Louis Botha the younger.

From the mists of the past there comes back a picture of that old Boer settler, Louis Botha the first, the father of the great South African—so different from that caricature of Boer character which became unhappily popular in England at that time—pious, it is true, and simple in his faith, but a quick, go-ahead man with a touch of Gallic spring and energy still in the blood. Like most of the Boers of the period, he was tall and a splendid shot. Dark-featured and blue-eyed, he was in his youth a singularly handsome man. But, although athletic and fond of sport, he was by no means wholly devoted to country pursuits. He was by temperament a townsman and a politician—a man keenly bent on affairs, interested in his fellow-men, quick at invention and eager for improvements, progressive in character and shrewd in outlook. As he grew older he went more and more into the towns, drawn by the magnet of public affairs, leaving the farm more and more to his sons. His brother, the Hon. Philip Botha, remained near Durban, became a member of the Natal Executive and a colleague of Harry Escombe. The old Louis had that instinctive, almost uncanny sympathy which enables a father to frame the horoscope of a well-loved son. "Mark my words, mother," he is still vividly remembered to have said to his wife, looking towards the young Louis and speaking with emphasis, "mark my words, that son of ours is going to make a name for himself."

Botha probably owes to this father a certain primary impulse towards public affairs, the habit and passion of a larger stage. But he also owes something more—a certain easy geniality in dealing with men. For the elder Botha was always a popular man with the crowd—a Homeric host, living with doors open to the world. He had many generous social tastes, and especially the countryman's passion for horses. At one time he even owned racehorses. It was characteristic of his kindness that he would lend money to impecunious friends and neighbours; and he finally had to pay the not unusual penalty for such indiscreet charity. Having backed a neighbour's bill, he had to meet the call, when it came, by selling his farm and shifting into the Orange Free State. There, near

Vrede in the district of Harrismith, he built a magnificent homestead called "Vroodepoort." It is a crucial evidence of the stress of this move that the thirteenth and youngest child was born in a temporary structure of wattle and daub.

Six years later the family moved to a fine up-to-date farm called "Leeuwkop," which was bought from an Englishman, and here they commenced ostrich farming.

Thus for the first time, by a mere accident, the Botha family left the British Colonies and became citizens of one of the Republics, then in the full romance of their earlier development.

The experience of these years must, indeed, have left a deep mark upon the younger members of Louis Botha's large family. They had to journey away into the depths of South Africa, over the great range of the Drakensberg, like those ancestors of theirs who in the 'thirties fled from British rule at the Cape, in that strange, sudden outburst of anger which followed upon what they regarded as the unreasonable exaltation of the black races. The Bothas now found themselves living in a country where wild animals were still numerous, including, not only jackals and wolves, but even occasionally lions. Education was difficult, and consisted in the irregular visits of those vagrant tutors—men with little qualification of training or character—who were then the only schoolmasters available to the more remote South African farms. The whole family had to work on the farm—husband and wife, boys and girls. The numerous Kaffirs had to be looked after and controlled, and the big straggling farm, with its wagon-houses, mud-houses, and out-houses, was more like a village than a single residence. Such a life called for every resource of self-reliance.

Happily, Louis Botha's mother was a woman well adapted to the demands of this adventurous existence. As the years passed, she became a handsome matron, very dark, with black hair and dark eyes. She was a woman who combined deep religious feeling with intense activity in the affairs of everyday life. This mother of the Bothas has, indeed, left a deep impression on her children. "A lovely mother," they still call her, and it is clear that she played a great part in keeping the family together through those strenuous years.

It is rather difficult for Europeans to form a picture of the life lived on these South African farms within the Republics in those far-off days of the 'eighties. The murky fog of race-hatred has done so much to obstruct any clear vision of that existence—to exaggerate its faults and to obscure its virtues—that it may be worth while to reconstruct some of its actual outlines.

It was a life of great simplicity, lived largely in the open air—a life of strenuous labour for all, young and old, combined with an unquestioning piety.

There were prayers twice a day—after breakfast and at nine o'clock in the evening. The Bible was read, and the praying, as is even now still often the habit in British Protestant households, emerged from the feeling and inspiration of the moment. On Sundays the church was held in rotation at one farm or another, and sometimes a pastor would come and stay for the Sunday. On week-days, during the seasons of sowing and harvest, the boys would be out in the fields early in the morning ploughing and sowing, and the girls would rise to get them early coffee. They would come in from their work hungry as wolves for their breakfast; and sometimes when the work was very hard the food would be sent out to them in the fields. We in England have little idea of these immense 5,000-acre farms on those treeless green spaces—with their fine crops of maize or lucerne or oats, and the black Basuto labourers working in the fields—the great spaces, the great distances, that sense of the vast and the unconfined which is the very breath and atmosphere of freedom.

On this farm Botha lived from an early age much among the blacks. He became familiar with those stern patriarchal relations towards the negroes which come so easily to the Boers, and which we British find so hard to understand. In those early years of work together, he grew familiar with the wants of the natives and developed a sympathy with them which he has never lost. He learnt to talk their languages :

he can still speak both Zulu and Sesuto[1] very well. As a boy he could talk Sesuto almost as a native, and would love to click it out as he talked with the Kaffir "boys" in the fields.

It would be difficult to imagine a life better adapted to teach responsibility and self-reliance to young people. The only danger was that the isolation might narrow their natures and roughen their manners. Conscious of these perils, the Dutch colonists in South Africa had from early times devised methods of bringing social amenities into these scattered farm-houses. The visiting teachers were unsatisfactory enough, and it was not uncommon for Botha's father to have to ride into town on Monday morning to fetch the tutor from the bed where he was sleeping off his Sunday drinking-bout. All that can be said for this primitive method of education was that it just enabled the children to master the elements of knowledge. More important for the Boer families was undoubtedly that habit of assemblage four times in a year at stated points to enable the young people to receive their first Communion. This was the famous "Nachtmaal"—a custom brought from Europe by the Protestant refugees.

The celebration of this sacred feast lasted sometimes for a whole week. Families journeyed from great distances to one common point. In those days before the railways, such travels would be undertaken in wagons or on horseback and would require much toil and endurance. The families would often have to journey for several days across the great veldt. But probably the effort was well worth the while: for it enabled these scattered folk to see and meet one another. They would exchange views and news. They would be saved from the worst perils of isolation. They would take a pride in the adornment of their children. For among the Protestants of South Africa, as among the Catholics of Brittany, the young people are dressed up for their first Communion—the girls in white and the boys in black: and it is perhaps not altogether an idle fancy that perceives, across all the gulfs of hate and prejudice, a certain community of reverence between the "Pardons" of Brittany and the "Nachtmaals" of South Africa.

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[1] The language of the Basutos.

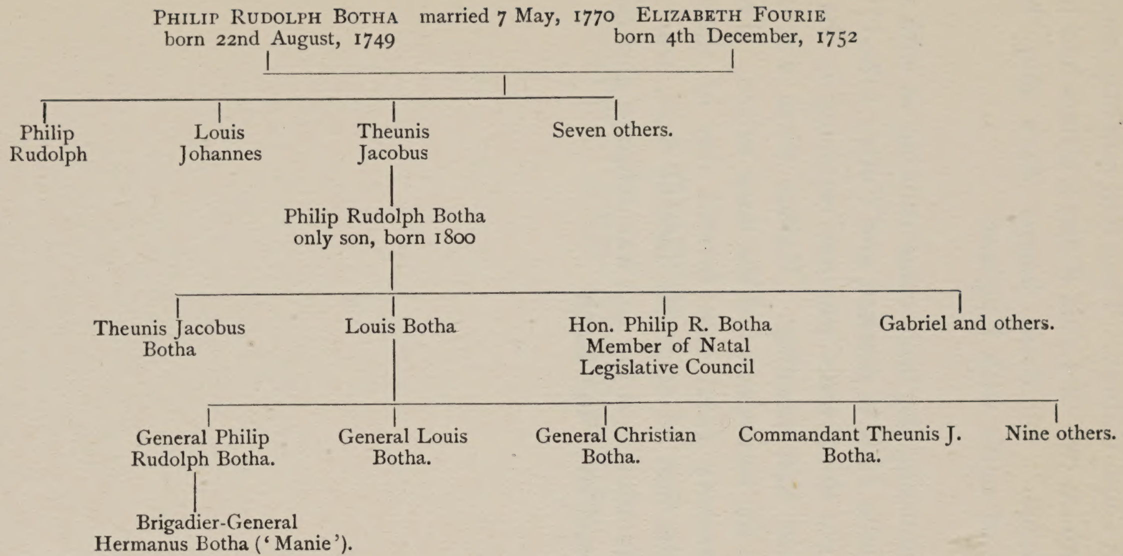
Another custom which in those old days took the edge off isolation was that of family hospitality. A large Boer farm like that of the Botha parents at Vrede became a great centre of hospitality to the children as they married and made their own homes. Before the Boer War it was quite customary for Dutch and English to intermarry, and several of Louis Botha's sisters married Englishmen who had settled in South Africa. When the children married they were always welcomed back readily by Mrs. Botha in the family farm-house with its numerous bedrooms and outhouses. The growing boys would be turned for the occasion out of the house into the outhouses, or even into the wagon-house, which contained many beds. There were few limits to the hospitality of such a family. For in those days the very desolation of the open veldt, by a certain law of opposites, seemed to breathe a human welcome into the few lonely houses scattered over these great spaces.

It was a happy, friendly existence—this life in the farm-houses on that high plateau under the lofty Drakensberg mountains in that glorious South African climate, with its hot summers and its cold, clear winters. Hard work did not prevent happiness, but rather helped it. All the children rode horses almost from their infancy. It was quite an ordinary thing to send a child of six or seven with a message for a long distance on horseback. They shot as soon as they reached their teens. It was the training of the ancient Persians—"to shoot straight and tell the truth." The discipline was strict and the work was hard; but there were compensations. Their father was a stern task-master during the week, but on Saturdays he would often give each boy a horse and saddle and tell him cheerfully to go out into the world and court the best girl he could find. There was little sombreness in such a life. On the week-ends there would be dancing and lawn tennis; for many of the young Boers were very fine tennis players even in those days. There was a great deal of simple cheerfulness and comradeship, as there always must be among young people in a great expanding country with that sense of growth and opportunity in the air which is like the feeling of springtime.

In the midst of his own family, the young Louis Botha already had a singular supremacy which seemed to have no relation to his age. For even his elder brothers would already turn to him for advice and counsel. "What do you think, Louis?" would be the end of many an argument. There was already something about his character which seemed to enforce obedience and respect. It is the confirmed usage of Dutch families that deference should be paid to the eldest, but this seemed to be an exception to the rule. "It is so hard to disobey Louis," was the common and quaint complaint of his elder brothers. It was not that he obtruded his advice or used his physical strength to enforce it. It was simply that he was already possessed of that serene, tranquil, common sense which those who know him now recognise as the crown of his character. It was then, as now, more than an intellectual quality. There was always about him a certain splendid strength and large-mindedness, a valorous selflessness, such as has so often made him since both terrible in battle and merciful in victory.

It was when Louis Botha was living this life as a young man on his father's farm that the first Boer War of 1881 broke out.

The Bothas, it will be realised, were not directly drawn into this struggle. They were living in the Free State, which then, and for many years after, was


Philip Rudolph Botha married 7 May, 1770 Elizabeth Fourie
born 22nd August, 1749
born 4th December, 1752
Philip Rudolph
Louis Johannes
Theunis Jacobus
Seven others.
Philip Rudolph Botha only son, born 1800
Theunis Jacobus Botha
Louis Botha
Hon. Philip R. Botha Member of Natal Legislative Council
Gabriel and others.
General Philip Rudolph Botha.
General Louis Botha.
General Christian Botha.
Commandant Theunis J. Botha.
Nine others.
Brigadier-General Hermanus Botha ('Manie').

on very friendly terms with the British Government and with Cape Colony. They had recently come from Natal, where two of Louis Botha's sisters had married Englishmen. In those happy days they had no thought of strife with England.

One morning the boys came running in with the cry —"Majuba Hill is retaken and Colley killed!"

I do not think there was any rejoicing in the Botha household that morning. Rather there was a deep sense of the seriousness of the issue raised. The most vivid memory from that fateful day of their early youth, the first of so many fateful days, was that as the hours advanced the sun was eclipsed and darkness was spread over the earth.

CHAPTER II

YOUTH AND ADVENTURE

CHAPTER II

YOUTH AND ADVENTURE

"To be young was very heaven!"—WORDSWORTH.

AT the age of twenty-two, in the year 1884, this happy, industrious life of the young Louis Botha at his father's farm in Vrede within the Orange Free State came to a sudden and romantic close. A great adventure called him "over the hills and far away"; and he responded to the call with that eager thrill of the blood which has made him march to the sound of the guns at all times in his life.

His father, Louis the elder, had died in July of the previous year, valiant in face of death. "The poor old man," wrote his son-in-law,[1] who was with him at the end, "was quite strong still, only complaining of want of breath. He wanted to be moved higher up in bed. Mama leant over him; he put his arms round her neck, raised himself, but then sank back in her arms and expired about ten minutes after. We buried him in the churchyard at Vrede on Saturday, and more than a hundred of his friends followed him to his grave."

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[1] Mr. Charles J. Pritchard, an Englishman.

Perhaps it was this death, and the breaking of threads with the past and the old home that made the young Louis Botha, like the mourning Lycidas, ready for the impulse to seek "fresh woods and pastures new."

Five years before, in the deep night, the watch-dogs had suddenly started barking at the home of the Bothas in the Orange Free State; and the family woke to the sound of wheels. It was the flight from Natal of two of Botha's sisters who had married and settled in that country.[1] The Zulu King, Cetewayo, was on the warpath.

The sisters stayed under the parental roof through the incidents of the bitter struggle that followed between the military machine of the Zulus and the slowly-roused strength of the British Empire—the massacre of Isandhlwana, the killing of the Prince Imperial, the victory of Ulundi, and the supposed conquest and partition of Zululand by Sir Garnet (afterwards Viscount) Wolseley (1879).

The effect of these events on the career of the young Botha was profound and far-reaching. They brought him into touch with the Natal Boers, and, above all, with Lukas Meyer, then Landrost of Utrecht, his father's old friend and leader of the Dutch across the Drakensberg. It was some forty years since Meyer had been forced to surrender the Republic of Natal to the British power; and now he once more hungered for the old freedom. It was in frequent talks with the older man that Botha caught the first shining glimpses of his new horizon.

Lukas Meyer from the first took a great interest in the young Louis Botha. He looked after the now fatherless youth with an almost paternal affection. It was on his suggestion that Louis and his friends at Vrede began in the winters of the early 'eighties to take their sheep for pasture across the Drakensberg mountains down to the warmer coast-lands still in the grip of the Zulus, the most formidable military power ever founded by a black race, and dangerous enough even then in the day of its decay.[1]

These winter "treks" of the young Botha were full of peril. For Zululand was subdued only in name. It was now harried by scattered bands of hungry savages who laughed at the authority of the thirteen chieftains established by Wolseley in place of the banished Cetewayo. Great Britain was too busy with other troubles at that moment[1] to desire the responsibility of governing this distant, explosive land. But the British armies had destroyed the only power that counted in Zululand; and all that was left was a dance of death.

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[1] Their military power had been founded eighty years before by a shrewd Zulu who had learnt military methods by watching the British soldiers training at Capetown. The terrible military machine forged by this man—Dingiswayo—had been carried to higher perfection by Chaka, Dingaan, Panda, and Cetewayo. By a policy of steady frightfulness they had desolated large parts of South Africa.

The most bloodthirsty of all the ruffianly bands which at this moment ravaged Zululand was the gang of Mapelo. His men were well mounted, and armed with rifles. Mapelo himself was as daring as he was savage. It says much for the courage of the young Botha that, in spite of the activity of this wild man, he brought his sheep across the mountains in 1882. But valour flourishes side by side with danger as the dock-leaf by the side of the nettle; there was a lull in Mapelo's activities at the moment; and a plucky missionary[2] had returned to occupy his old mission station at Hlobane about six miles from Botha's camp.

It was on a tranquil day in the midst of this South African winter that a native rushed into Botha's camp. He breathlessly warned the young Boer to fly and save his life. Mapelo was "out." Only an hour or two previously he had cut the throat of the missionary; the native had just left the body of the unhappy man lying still warm on his own dining-room table.

Botha had little time to make up his mind. But one thing was clear—he could not desert his sheep. Most of them belonged to his brothers. So he began to prepare to face the raiders. Looking at his bandolier he found, to his dismay, that he had only one cartridge left. Scarcely had he realised this when a body of Zulu horsemen appeared about a quarter of a mile away over a rise of ground in extended order and charged towards the wagon, waving their rifles over their heads and shouting like demons possessed.

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[1] For instance, Ireland and Egypt.

[2] A German named Schroeder.

Louis Botha rose and very deliberately mounted the box-seat of his wagon. He laid his rifle in a conspicuous place next to him. Then he proceeded, with an outward calm very foreign to his own inner feelings, to light a match and apply it slowly to his pipe. Looking up he found that the native horsemen had drawn rein in a cloud of dust within a few yards of the front of the wagon. They were halted in a semicircle.

A few seconds of dead silence followed, the natives glaring at Botha and Botha eyeing them with a steady gaze of surprise. Then Mapelo advanced, and stated that his men were very hungry and wanted something to eat. Botha gravely demurred at this stormy way of approach, and coolly bargained with these fierce invaders of his peace. At last he agreed to give them one sheep on the strict condition that they would withdraw some distance from his camp and not disturb him again. The condition was accepted; and so ended an incident which Botha has always described as one of the most disturbing in his whole life.

In 1883 the British Government, still shrinking from full responsibility, tried to stem the tide of anarchy of Zululand by sending back Cetewayo. The old King, softened by contact with civilisation and weakened by its strong drinks, inspired no fear in his old subjects. The spell of his power had been shattered by his banishment. For a short time the chieftains turned from the work of mutual slaughter to a combined blood-hunt of their former master. Chased into a native reserve, he died there in 1884, not without suspicion of foul play. On his deathbed Cetewayo appointed as his successor his son Dinizulu, a youth of sixteen; and finding the British Government deaf to his appeals, he sent, on behalf of his son, a dying message to the Boers. It was this message that was now conveyed to the Boers living on the border by Nyama, the chief Minister of the old King.

The Boers were in no mood to face the enterprise. They were ready for a new "trek." But they knew the Zulus well, and they would take no risks. Before undertaking to support Dinizulu they were determined to be quite sure of their ground. They would give their services only on terms of compensation; and they were resolute that the terms should be strictly ascertained and guaranteed.

The first step was to secure the person of the young King and to place him in a position to make a free bargain. Two Boers[1] undertook this task. They travelled in a horsed trap right through the heart of

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[1] Messrs. Von Staden and C. F. Meyer.

Zululand, to Nkandhla, entirely unarmed, and very ostentatiously on "private business." The country was swarming with murderous bands; but at that time a divinity still hedged the person of a white man among the blacks of South Africa, and they passed unscathed through the midst of these ferocious men. Dinizulu was found and conveyed in safety to the Transvaal border, at the Pivaan, in April, 1884.

Here a verbal agreement was entered into between the Ministers of the Prince and his Boer allies. The Boers generally undertook to restore Dinizulu to his kingdom and his country to peace on condition that, in return, they were to receive grants of land. Early in May, 1884, a small commando of Boers entered Zululand as the first step towards carrying out this agreement, and on May 3 encamped at Tinta's Drift on the Umfolosi, about five miles from Vryheid.

It was this expedition which, on the persuasion of Lukas Meyer, Louis Botha now joined, together with his friend Cheere Emmet,[1] a descendant of the famous Robert Emmet who had laid down his life for Irish freedom less than a century before. Like the sons of the old patriarchs, and perhaps with a conscious regard for their example, the sons of the Boer farmers were always ready to go forth and conquer new lands for farming and settlement. The risks counted for little. At any rate, it was a better life than staying on the old farm as a dependent or perhaps sinking to the level of a "By-wooner."[1] So Botha was following along the lines of old traditions when he set out on his journey.

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[1] Directly descended from Thoma Eddis Emmet, the brother of Robert, who was himself unmarried.

It was a great affair—this setting forth into the wilds of a new wave of wanderers. The young Boer had to take with him on such ventures everything required for sustaining life. The wagon was the key to the undertaking—the ship of the great rolling veldt. It became the mother's duty to load this ship with victuals for months of wandering; and well did Mrs. Botha perform this last duty to her son. Those old Boer wagons were wonderful structures—little less than houses on wheels, drawn by long teams of oxen and driven by Kaffirs, the floors crammed with provisions, while, above, the beds were slung on ropes like hammocks.

Once started, the wagon would travel by night and by day, "outspanning" now and again for two hours at a time in the heat of noontide, while the oxen grazed on the veldt. The young Boers would often prefer to journey through the cool of the night, sleeping themselves while the Kaffirs drove. The food would be of the simplest. There were piles of rusks baked for weeks before the start, while the long strips of meat would be drying out of the sun under the trees to make that wonderful "biltong" which is the staple food of the Boer on the march. Then there would be casks of butter and sacks of potatoes—no wonder that the Boer loved his wagon! But beyond the hammocks there was no furniture except the indispensable Boer rifle—the Martini-Henry, at that time the terror of the Zulus.

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[1] A casual agricultural labourer, with no stake in the farm.

At first little more than a hundred men gathered round Lukas Meyer. But volunteers soon flowed in from all parts—from the Transvaal, in spite of the veto of the Republican Government; from Natal; and from the Orange Free State. Registers were opened for the due record of the names of the volunteers; and by the end of May the numbers had grown to 400. The register was then closed, and eight Boers were chosen as an impromptu Government to preserve order and to conduct the enterprise. Everything was done by rule in this strange expedition. Later on the numbers grew to 800, and the registers were opened again; but the later comers were to receive, as was most just, smaller grants of land.

On May 21 the verbal agreement made with Dinizulu was solemnly ratified at a great Indaba of the loyal chiefs, and Dinizulu was formally crowned King of the Zulus in the presence of a great concourse of his followers on the Nyatisberg at a farm now called "Zalf Lager" (Anointment Camp) in commemoration of this historical ceremony. Dinizulu was now left to the protection of his chief Ministers, and the Boers proceeded to the business of making his Kingship a reality.

Messages were now sent to the rival chieftains informing them of this coronation, and among others to Usibepu, who had raised himself by personal ability and success in war to be virtual master of Zululand. On May 12 the messenger returned with a tale of welcome from the crafty chieftain, who professed to hail with delight a return of peace and the restoration of the kingdom to Dinizulu. But he did not attend the Indaba, and his warm message was followed by the news of his murder of four men and women belonging to the Usutus, the tribe that supported the dynasty of Cetewayo. Here was a challenge writ in blood.

It was clear now that Usibepu intended to fight, and that if Dinizulu were to become King indeed, his rebel chieftain must be crushed. Lukas Meyer and his Boers had already advanced to Tabankulu; and they now promised to advance directly against Usibepu if the Ministers of Dinizulu would collect an "Impi" of Usutus. At the summons of the young King, some 7,000 warriors instantly gathered from the caves and fastnesses of the hills and forests of Zululand—men lean with famine and so cowed by defeat that flight had become their natural gait. No crops had been sown or reaped in Zululand for many seasons; and these men had lived on fruits, roots, or such wild animals as they could kill. To this harassed and battered body Lukas Meyer added over 100 picked Boer fighters and advanced with Louis Botha and his young companions against Usibepu in the first week of June, 1884.

The wily Zulu chieftain had retired with his warriors and his cattle to the thorny coverts of the Ubombo, a land then of thick bush and marshes. There, along the banks of the River Umkusi, he concealed his men in deep and difficult ambushes and awaited the approach of the Boers.

Meyer advanced slowly and cautiously, dividing his forces into three bodies—on his left, along the river banks, sixteen Europeans with a detachment of Zulus under the chief Mamese; in the centre, the main body under his own command following the tracks of Usibepu's retreat; on his right, a company of native scouts.

The Zulu rebel chief had devised a very ingenious plan of battle, well worthy of the Zulu genius for war. He had placed a body of men on the river slightly in advance of his own central position, which was about a thousand yards from its banks. This detachment was to attack the pursuing impi on the flank while it was passing along the track of this retreat. By thus diverting the attention of Meyer's forces to their left flank, this attack was to give Usibepu the opportunity of assaulting the Boers from the unguarded rear, forcing them on to the river, and possibly hemming them in against its banks.

But the division of Meyer's forces entirely spoilt this plan. Mamese's impi with its Europeans attacked the Zulus posted along the river just when they were preparing their onslaught against the flank of Meyer's column. At the same moment, the presence of the main Zulu column was revealed by their own carelessness or undisciplined zeal. Meyer halted and dismounted his men. Usibepu's "impis," seeing that they were discovered, instantly advanced to the attack. Meyer's Boers met their thundering charge with steady volleys from their rifles. The charge was broken: none of the Zulus reached the Boer ranks: in ten minutes they broke and fled.

Meanwhile, the Usutu loyalist warriors, hearing the war-cry of their enemies and that abominable clatter of shields and kerries which spelt slaughter to their ears, instantly turned and ran. A force of Boers mounted and rounded them up, threatening to fire into their flying ranks. Finding that there was nowhere to fly to, the Usutus turned and realised that their enemies were already in flight also. This welcome discovery effectively restored their courage. They turned in pursuit, and now their greyhound condition served them well. There were old scores to wipe out; and the rest of the day's work could safely be left to them.

Such was Botha's first battle, full of ruses and stratagems, of the kind that he himself loved to practise in later days. It was a decisive conflict. It gave Meyer's force complete command of Zululand; and after that everything was over except the shouting, the negotiating, and the division of the conquered lands.

CHAPTER III

THE "NEW REPUBLIC"

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THE "NEW REPUBLIC"

> "Seeing that every State is a sort of association and every association is formed for the attainment of some good, it is evident that as some good is the object of all associations, the highest good is the object of the supreme institution of all, the State."—Aristotle's Politics.

Looking round at the world after their victory at Ubombo the Boer pioneers came to a momentous decision. They resolved to found a new State to be called the "New Republic."

There was evidently a great task of government to be faced.

For, instantly the battle was over, the fugitive Zulus appeared in multitudes from every rock and cranny of the land, trains of women and children, lank, haggard men—carrying their simple household goods on their shoulders, and streaming down from the hills to reoccupy the plains. Kraals sprang up like mushrooms on the calcined ground of their burnt villages; and soon the glint of the hoe in the August sun recalled the joy of Tubal Cain.

These people must be governed. They could not be allowed to sink back into misery and anarchy. So, in the first week of August, the "New Republic" was started, and a brand-new Constitution was drawn up, with a Volksraad of twelve members, a President, a General, a set of laws, and even a law court. A Judge was borrowed, and an Executive was appointed.[1] General Joubert, the famous Transvaaler, was asked to become President. On his refusal, Lukas Meyer was appointed.

Surely one of the most rapid pieces of State-making that the world has ever seen!

Louis Botha was still too young to be a ruler of men; but he was appointed one of the Commissioners for the cutting up of the ceded territory into the farms promised to the registered Boers. He was employed in this work for over a year. Some 800 farms were inspected by himself and his colleagues and measured, sometimes by the simple old process of letting the owners ride round the ground at a slow walk. It was impossible to satisfy everyone—some of the farms had to be fixed in remote and desolate places; and their owners gave expression to their feelings by such names as "Jericho" and "Thule." Botha himself was fortunate. He had drawn a farm named "Fort Louis"

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[1] State Secretary, D. J. Esselen; Treasurer and Registrar, J. R. Bell; Attorney-General, J. Henderson; Native Commissioner, R. Wilhelm; Landrost, A. von Levetzow.

(after the Prince Imperial) near Babawango. But it happened that a Boer who had drawn a farm near Vryheid and close to the Emmets particularly desired an exchange. His relations lived near "Fort Louis"; and Botha wished to be near the Emmets. The bargain was struck to the advantage and satisfaction of all parties; and thus Botha came into possession of the beautiful farm which he was destined to occupy for the next fifteen years.

These activities as Commissioner of Lands kept Louis Botha away from the centre, and he was, therefore, not then involved in the difficult and prolonged diplomatic fight for existence into which the "New Republic" now entered. The first care of the new Government was to safeguard their position with Dinizulu and his Ministers. On August 16, 1884, the Zulus were sent for, and formal negotiations began with the object of defining precisely the extent of the land ceded to the Boers and the extent of their authority. The King was assisted by Mr. W. Grant, of the Aborigines' Protection Society. After prolonged discussion and explanation a settlement was arrived at, signed by all parties, and published in both the Natal and the Transvaal newspapers. It guaranteed to the Boers no fewer than 3,000,000 acres of land and a general undefined control over the whole of Zululand.[1]

This was too much for the surrounding States, both

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[1] See the full agreement set forth in Appendix I.

Boer and British. The Orange Free State, not being directly concerned, had agreed to recognise the "New Republic." But neither the Transvaal nor Natal would acknowledge its right to exist as an independent State. The British Government, indeed, issued no direct veto. Lukas Meyer visited Pietermaritzburg in October, 1886, to explain the agreement to the Governor. No attempt was made to dispute the legitimacy of the agreement with Dinizulu. But the British refused absolutely to sanction the general claim to control Zululand; and in 1886 they placed a final ban on that clause of the agreement by proclaiming Zululand within the British sphere of influence. There was another definite limit imposed. When, in July of 1885, some more enterprising Boers began to lay out a township in St. Lucia Bay, naming it Eugénie after the French Empress, once more the Island Empire roused herself from slumber. Stretching forth a long arm, Great Britain firmly thrust back the Boers from access to her sacred seas.[1]

The troubles of the "New Republic" did not end there. In 1887 Dinizulu entered upon the course of intrigue between Boer and Briton so tempting to the wily Zulu nature. His presence was demanded in Vryheid, and a commando was sent to fetch him from his residence on Boer territory. He fled into British

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[1] The matter was settled by the grant of an equivalent amount of land in the interior, which consoled the Boers as amounting to a "sort of" recognition of the New Republic.

Zululand, where he soon after entangled himself in the disturbances which led to his exile.

This event decided the Executive; for it removed the only safe guarantee of their independence. A movement was started for annexation to the Transvaal, and only just got ahead of a similar movement of annexation to Natal. The annexation to the Transvaal was swiftly arranged by Lukas Meyer, and in July, 1888, the "New Republic" closed its brief existence and became, by easy and almost unconscious transition, a District or Magistracy of the South African Republic with two members—later on four—in the Volksraad. The little State carried a surplus of £6,000 into the Transvaal Treasury, a creditable end for a country with a total revenue of £15,000.

Louis Botha, at any rate, had done his best to uphold the pillars of the little Republic. When he had finished his work as Commissioner of Lands and returned to Vryheid, he found the capital of the Republic growing rapidly. The houses were being built with that rapidity which fills the atmosphere of a new human settlement with some of the magic of springtime. Already in January, 1885, it is recorded that the "village clocks were looking very pretty," and that the foundations of the public buildings were already visible.[1]

But to secure the new State, stern work was still needed. Taxes had to be collected and justice had to be executed. The sale of the sites at Vryheid was not likely to supply enough money to run the State. A hut-tax had to be imposed on the natives—always a difficult tax to collect and explain. A Boer, appointed as Field Cornet and collector of taxes in the wildest regions of the Ubombo wildernesses, fought shy of that dangerous duty. Botha volunteered. He held this difficult office from 1886 to 1894. As Field Cornet he was a local official of considerable power in the old Dutch colonial organisation. He had to keep the military roll, having the duty to register, summon, and assemble all men liable to military service in time of war.[1] In 1894 he was appointed as Special Native Commissioner in Swaziland. There he resided for a whole year (1894).

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[1] See *Natal Mercury*, 1885, *passim*.

Thus did Botha serve his hard and strenuous apprenticeship in public duties.

Before entering upon this hard and exacting life, Botha married. After the victory over the Zulu rebels he had returned home to Vrede in the Free State to fetch his bride and take her back to his new home.

The girl of his choice was Annie Emmet, the sister of Cheere Emmet, his comrade in peace and war. Thus in happy wedlock Botha forged a golden link between sunny South Africa and that distressful island in the far-off grey Atlantic.

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[1] The Burghers were compelled to be on the roll, and if they neglected to respond to the Field Cornet's summons, they were liable to fine and imprisonment and might lose their votes.

The story of Botha's engagement to Annie Emmet is one of those love romances which we like to think of as the special pride of the free white races. As a young girl, Annie Emmet had been the life and soul of the house on the farm of her father, John Emmet. She had been already an active helper in the day-to-day work, even looking after the grass-burning, one of the most difficult tasks on a South African farm. She was South African born, but her Irish blood came out vividly in her character—for she was always graceful and charming, full of sparkling wit and humour, already a great favourite in that free young life of the open veldt. From early days she showed her daring and independence. When almost a child she had drifted into an engagement with a man for whom she ceased to care as she grew to years of discretion. Her parents tried to bind her to this youthful pledge; but Annie, refusing to sacrifice her life to a childish caprice, left her home and trusted to her own resources. She lived at a well-known school called "The Home" at Bloemfontein as a pupil teacher for three years, acquiring there, perhaps, that wide sympathy for the humble worker which characterises her to-day.

When she returned home she met the young Louis Botha as her brother's special friend, and there sprang up between them a deep attachment which soon ripened into love. It was at this budding moment in Botha's life that his mother, Mrs. Louis Botha—never quite the same since her husband's death—died so suddenly that the children had scarcely time to reach her bedside. Botha returned from his expedition to a saddened home; and as there was now no tie to keep him at Vrede, it was decided that the marriage should take place immediately so that he could take Annie Emmet back with him to the New Republic. There was a quiet wedding; a honeymoon in the old home; and then the first long "trek." Travelling in their slow-moving wagon, the young couple passed across the Drakensberg by way of Laing's Nek, journeyed along beneath the fateful shadow of Majuba Hill, and then down the long valley through the lower hills until they reached their new home at Vryheid.

Here, then, in this land of last-born freedom, Louis Botha and his wife settled down as pioneers, with, as neighbours, the Lukas Meyers, the family of the State President, and the Emmets. They were in the newest of new countries. It was for them to carry into this land that tradition of orderly and industrious living for which their race had as a whole stood hitherto in South Africa. It now became their task to help and encourage the scattered white settlers in all those difficulties and depressions which come to human beings when they are living without the help of well-trodden conventions or ordered government. They were in the position of people on a ship at sea, where character asserts itself and develops in a way unknown to the well-guarded inhabitants of great cities. It was in this life and under these conditions that the qualities of Louis Botha grew to maturity.

The young settlers had to start everything for themselves from the beginning. At first they lived in a four-roomed cottage; then they gradually built for themselves one of those large and capacious farms which in those days almost took the place in South Africa of the castles which landowners in the Middle Ages built in early England. Louis Botha's farm, indeed, was for a time the centre of government for his district. With that strange innate faculty of leadership which belongs instinctively to some men, he stepped in a moment into the position of a kind of local chief to his district. He acted as judge and ruler. He even opened on his farm an impromptu post office, to which all the letters from Vryheid were brought to be sorted. The clerks lived on the premises. Thus he became the recognised adviser and counsellor of the settlers around him. They came to him in all their troubles. He led them and guided them in ordinary times; and in times of crisis his was the deciding voice.

We must not figure the government of this young Republic as touched with any of the grandeur or dignity that attaches to European Governments. The Councils sat in the only hotel and sometimes debated in the bar. There was no law of extradition, and so a varied population drifted in, not always easy to control.

It was a strange, hand-to-mouth existence, making a daily call on a man's best powers. Probably Botha could not have asserted his authority if he had not been the ideal of all that the young Boers loved and admired most—a splendid rider, a magnificent shot, a man famous for his daring and initiative. At that time he was very tall, thin, and bony, like an athlete ready for any contest. He was especially famed for his skill in training young wild horses, and perhaps there is no art better calculated to prepare men for human government.

It was, indeed, during Louis Botha's farming life at Vryheid that an incident occurred in his dealings with animals which nearly cost him his life. His brother, Chris Botha, one day came to pay him a visit. There was a young bull which was a special favourite of Louis Botha's, and he used often to go and talk to the bull and scratch its neck. Louis and Chris were in the enclosure together, and Louis turned his back on the bull and engaged in conversation with his brother Chris. The young bull was seized with jealousy, and, rushing at Louis, tossed him and drove one of his horns under a rib. Chris, a man of great strength, gripped the bull's horns and held on with the fierceness of one who is face to face with death. Then the Kaffirs came and secured the bull with ropes. As soon as he could leave the bull, Chris ran to Louis and picked him up. He had been gored right through the ribs and stunned. Chris thought that his brother was dead. He went straight to the house, fetched a gun, and shot the bull. Happily, Louis was then, as now, of a strong constitution, and he made a wonderful recovery from his injuries, though the effects were felt for years afterwards.

It was a wonderful farm—this which Louis Botha built at Vryheid. It stood near a river, and was named by him "Waterval." He planted lines of trees along the avenues of approach which he laid out. He collected into the capacious house all his old family treasures and portraits, and made it a very beautiful and well-beloved centre for his young and growing family. There four children were born—two boys and two girls. Unhappily, this beautiful home was burnt to the ground during the South African War. With his characteristic refusal to disturb old memories, Louis Botha has never since revisited the site of this farm.

Looking back, this life springs once more into vivid movement like the happy past in Maeterlinck's "Land of Memory"—the merry, busy, eager young family—the gatherings of the young settlers, and the settlers' children—the atmosphere of mingled peril and hope—of planning and building, in a country where the future filled the horizon with golden mists of promise. For this life, with its demands for gaiety and vigour, the young Mrs. Botha was splendidly fitted. A delightful mother to her children, she also had energy to make "Waterval" a centre for the pioneers around. Her charm and social aptitude gave to Botha's life that serene background which is the best aid to a man increasingly burdened with affairs.

In 1895, Louis Botha stood as Vryheid candidate for the second Transvaal Volksraad, Lukas Meyer being already then member in the first Volksraad. He fought against a powerful official Krugerite candidate, one Birkinstok, and was returned at the head of the poll. It was a sensational victory for the young man, and a great beginning for a political career. The result now drew him within the inner circle of that conflict of races already (in 1895) working towards such tragic and momentous issues; for from this time forward he had to live during six months of the year in Pretoria. He was obliged to resign his Field Cornetcy and to hand over his farming to managers.

Scarcely had he entered into politics when South Africa was startled with the tremendous challenge of that ill-starred adventure—the "Jameson Raid." The story of the "New Republic" will have taught us that Africa is not Europe. The formative period of a continent must not be judged by the standards of fixed and ordered communities—if, indeed, any such can still be said to exist. But the evil of the Jameson Raid to Botha and his group was that it came just when they were pleading and wishing for peace against the rooted suspicions of the old Dutch party. The event fed those suspicions and quickened the fever in the blood of South Africa. From that moment the old order, challenged at its centre, began definitely to arm. The work of Botha's party became a forlorn hope.

The sense of this catastrophe gave point to Botha's anger. He always took a severe view of the enterprise which ended in Jameson's capture at Doornkop. It is one of the paradoxes of South African history that Botha was definitely in favour of shooting Dr. Jameson and the leaders of the raid, while Kruger was in favour of mercy. Thus for the first time did Botha display that sense of the rigour of war which often goes along with the profoundest love of peace.

But in spite of the "Jameson Raid," both before and after, Botha did not despair of peace. He steadily gave his support in the Volksraad to the party of opposition to President Kruger. He was a faithful follower of Joubert, Kruger's great progressive rival. Throughout these last years of peace (from 1896 to 1899) he steadily voted against Kruger's methods of rule, especially the habit of raising money by granting concessions for cash. He spoke now and again in the Volksraad; but he already had the rare and precious gift of silence except when he really had something to say. He was already in training for the larger career in that strange, narrow school of the old Republican assembly. Botha was already fitting himself for the future guidance of South Africa.

It was while he and his friends were still striving to preserve the friendship of the two white races that there came the sudden letting out of the many waters of strife.

On October 9, 1899, Kruger sent to the British Government the famous Ultimatum which meant war.

Even at that supreme moment Botha cast his voice for peace. He was one of that small body of seven Republicans who voted in the Volksraad against the Ultimatum.[1]

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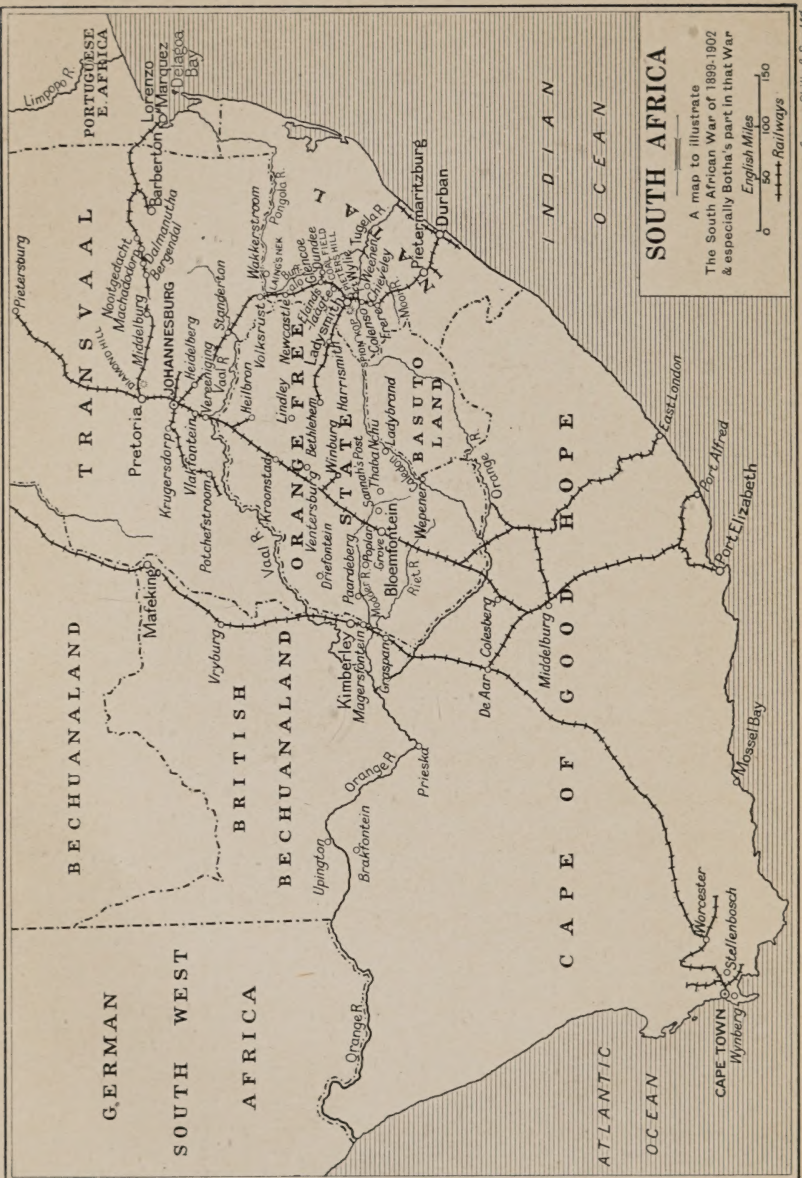
[1] The others were De la Rey, Lukas Meyer, Barnard, Loveday, Depening, and Labuschagne. Lukas Meyer was then Chairman of the First Volksraad.

CHAPTER IV

WAR (1899–1900)



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CHAPTER IV

WAR (1899-1900)

> "Tumultuous wars
> Shall kin with kin and kind with kind confound."
> —RICHARD II.

THERE was probably no man in South Africa who less desired war in the autumn of 1899 than Louis Botha. He was even slow to believe in its possibility. A few weeks before the outbreak of war the people at Pretoria had already begun to fly. Botha was asked whether he would advise people to leave. "Well, they can run away," he said, "but I'm not going to move. I think war will be avoided." It was then suggested to him that he would not have to fight as he was a Member of the Volksraad. "No!" he said. "If there is a war, I shall be the first to go, but we still hope to avoid war."

This was certainly Botha's aim right up to the eve of strife. Like Falkland in our English Civil War, he ingeminated peace; but, unlike Falkland, when the war once broke out he turned his back on peace until a decision had been reached by way of war.

For Botha and his family this was actually a civil war. Several of his sisters had, as we have seen, married Englishmen, and some of the sons of those marriages fought on the English side. No one can quite appreciate the real horror of that great struggle unless they realise this rending and cleaving of families which took place from end to end of South Africa.

Botha now (in October, 1899) joined Lukas Meyer's commando and marched with him towards the frontier of Natal.

The causes of the desperate strife between Dutch and English which opened with that march lie far back in the history of South Africa—in the division of race, in the rivalry of racial ambitions for power.

It is not for us here to revive the issues which were then valorously and chivalrously fought to a finish by two heroic races.

"Whatever is, is best," sang Pope. It is good to extend that view to the past of mankind and say, "Whatever was, was best." Perhaps by no other method than this sharp surgery of war could South Africa have been united in our times.

When Botha marched with the Boers into Natal he held no great position in the invading forces. He was just a Field Cornet in the Transvaal Army, under the supreme command of General Joubert, then Commander-in-Chief of the South African Republic. All that Botha knew of war had been learnt in his fight for Dinizulu in Zululand. Like most of the Boers, Botha was just a soldier-farmer going out to war. As a Field Cornet, he held some small disciplinary powers over the commando of Vryheid, but throughout the earlier period of the war the authority of the Boer officers was always a doubtful quantity, and rather political than military.

Thus Botha fought almost as a private soldier under Lukas Meyer in those early battles on the borders of Natal and the Transvaal—Talana Hill, Elandslaagte, Dundee—when the Boer army so signally failed to convert success into victory. But even in that position his military genius soon began to show its light. It was the very looseness of the Boer war discipline, with the free play that it gives to personal leading, that enabled him to show his work in the field. At the battle of Dundee he played a leading part along with old Gert de Jaeger, and would probably have surrounded General Penn Symons if he had been properly supported. Two days later the Boers would quite possibly have intercepted General Yule in his wonderful march from Dundee to Ladysmith if Botha's advice had been taken.

At the opening of any war the authority of the older officers is always paramount. It is only gradually that men perceive the vital importance in war of youth and all that goes with it—energy, passion, initiative, and that open-mindedness which is so often actually killed by the timidity bred of experience. War is the fertile mother of surprise and novelty: it is, perhaps, the one sphere of human activity where experience counts least. Age, too, is a form of vested interest; and it powerfully resists the appeal of the coming generation that knocks at the door.

Thus it is not remarkable that Botha came so slowly to the front: the miracle rather is that when he once began to come forward he advanced so swiftly. It is a high credit to the older Boers that when Botha's military genius shone out beyond denial or challenge, they so readily gave him room.

The first undeniable proof of Botha's powers was the battle of Rietfontein on October 30. In that battle Sir George White's army was driven back into the basin of Ladysmith, his main column drawn into a cross-fire, his right driven back in disorder, and his left entirely captured at Nicholson's Nek. To these astonishing results Botha's strategy was reputed to have contributed much; and his reputation steadily rose with success. He was now readily, in spite of his youth, granted a right to speak in the "Krijgsraad."[1]

But he was not, of course, allowed a free hand in regard to Ladysmith. He was still without any military rank; and he had to sit idly by watching the Boer Generals allow the golden hours slip by them, and until the attack became a siege, the siege a blockade, and the blockade slowly lapsed into a defence. The "elder Generals" of the War Council only shook their heads and smiled at the wild rashness of this junior who really wanted to capture the beleaguered town, and saw that the siege might become, as it did, an entanglement for the Boers quite as much as for the British. For these old Boer Generals of the war of 1881 had little ideas of strategy beyond the defensive.

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[1] Council of War.

The Commander-in-Chief, General Joubert, had opposed the war, and had no real heart in the plan of invasion. His essential idea was to keep on the defensive. A kindly, tender-hearted old man of a true Christian type, he even shrank from the shedding of blood—a trait admirable in a man, but embarrassing in a General. It was, perhaps, fortunate for us that Joubert was still in chief command during these critical early days of the Natal campaign, when the Boers actually outnumbered us and could, with proper military energy and daring, have swept down to the sea and held South Africa against our landing. Botha saw this and was all for a vigorous and daring exercise of aggressive power. All that Joubert did was to lead a small raiding force into Natal and to lead them back again.

Through October and November (1899) Botha looked on with a keen and hungry eye at the blunders of his superiors. He often felt inclined to weep with vexation as he saw the chances of victory slip away from his own people. He watched the day of invasion vanish. He saw the Boer army diminish from a majority to a minority as the troops gathered from every part of the world-Empire whose power they had challenged. It looked as if the dream of victory would quickly give way to the reality of dire defeat.

Then, suddenly, came Botha's opportunity. At the end of November Joubert was thrown from his horse by the explosion of a shell and became seriously ill from the shock. The old General was unable to continue in the fighting line. He must go to Pretoria to recover. A successor must be found to meet the imminent advance from the south of Sir Redvers Buller with his great army for the relief of Ladysmith. Always generous in his estimates and utterly free from jealousy, the old man recommended Botha for the task.

The Commandants met and consulted. Unhappily, they did not go so far at once as to appoint Botha full Commandant-in-Chief. They kept many other Commanders still in power at different points on the lines. But they chose Louis Botha to be Acting Assistant General for the defence of the southern lines against Buller; and thus it came that he was Commander of the Boer forces at the battle of Colenso.

This appointment was really a remarkable occurrence, equally creditable both to Botha and to the Commandants. For among the Boers age is held in great respect, and most of the Boer Commandants are old men. It was no small matter that these old men should have all agreed to set up a much younger man—for Botha was then only thirty-eight years of age—over themselves. Such a decision could only be accounted for by a display of genius beyond dispute.

It was such genius that Botha was now to display, beyond all cavil or challenge, in the battle of Colenso.

Colenso seems a small affair nowadays, an affair of pigmies, not to be mentioned in the presence of Titanic strifes. Yet in some respects it marks an epoch.

For it was the first battle that clearly and finally showed to modern soldiers the power of the defensive given to skilful hands in modern battles fought with modern weapons.

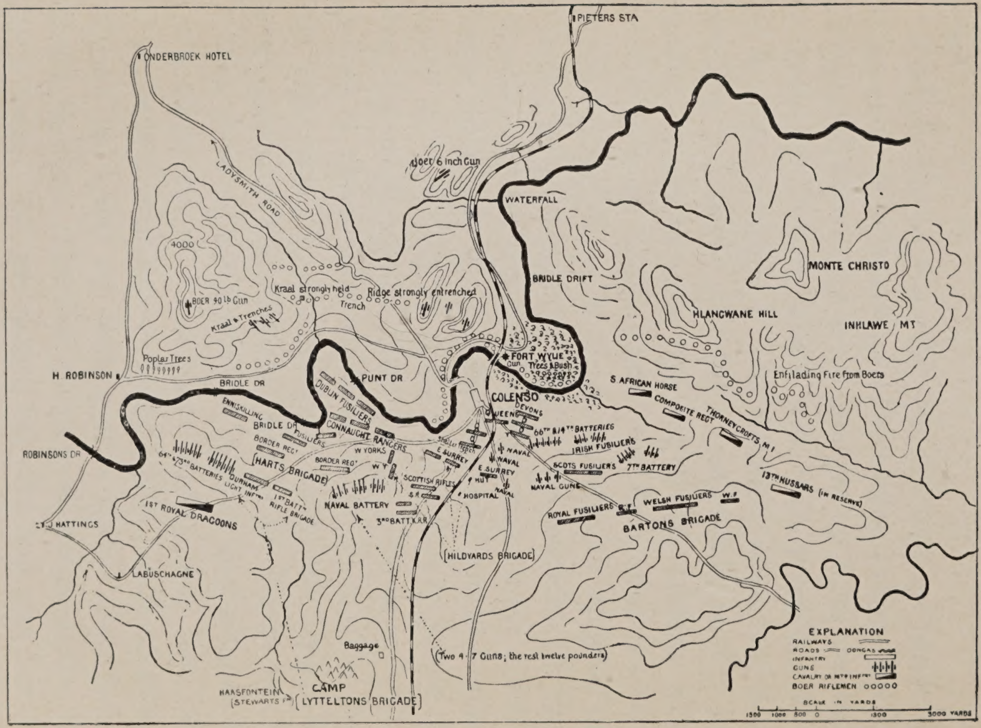
The importance of battles, indeed, is not to be measured by numbers. At Colenso, Botha fought with only 6,000 men against Buller's 18,000. But the great battles fought by the myriad hosts in the Great War have done little more than illustrate and emphasise the lessons of that day—when an unknown farmer-soldier, extended on a few hills with a river in front of him, set at naught all the efforts of a General of valour and experience leading into action the flower of European soldiery.

It was at one o'clock on the morning of December 15, 1900, that Louis Botha, sleeplessly vigilant, learnt from a Boer scout that the whole British camp was lit up. At last he knew that the attack was coming; and the word was sent along the silent, watching lines.

Perhaps Botha was glad that the long suspense was at an end. For two days—December 13–14—the big naval guns which had been brought up from the ships to help the British attack had been pounding away at the Boer defences. The damage, according to all credible witnesses, had been remarkably slight; and British observers even saw the Boers moving about from trench to trench under our fire. But the bombardment had been a clear warning of approaching attack, and Botha had wasted no moment of those days in preparing to receive what was surely coming. Night and day the Republicans had worked ceaselessly at those deep, protecting trenches which the Boer Generals were the first to dig. The deep fissures delved in those early months of the Boer War were the true originals of that great labyrinth which has since extended from Switzerland to the North Sea.[1]

The terror of the Boers was then, as ever afterwards, of a night attack. For three nights they had been lying in their trenches on guard against such an attack. Hence the relief on finding that Buller intended to attack by day. For that purpose all preparations had been made. All the ranges for rifle and gun fire had

[1] After the Boer War the Germans sent a Bureau to South Africa to study the trench warfare of the Boers.



PLAN OF THE BATTLE OF COLENSO.

To face page 69.

been carefully taken; and commandos of picked marksmen had been placed on selected kopjes to check and stay the British advance. Then, as always, the Boer Commanders placed all their confidence in the power of rifle fire.

Buller, on his side, was very sure of victory, and there was the pride of the professional attacking raw farmer levies: there was the confidence of the expert, still trusting in fixed rules and regulations. The bombardment had drawn no reply. The Republican resistance, therefore, must have been already broken. Buller himself seems to have even imagined that the Boer forces had been withdrawn. According to all the rules of Aldershot warfare, the next step was to attack and prevail.

Botha himself, with a remarkable insight into the pride of the expert, had selected with conviction three spots against which he felt quite certain that Buller would direct his attack—his extreme right opposite the western Bridle Drift, his centre opposite Colenso village, and his left, Hlangwane Hill. Botha has often since declared that not once during the day of December 15 did he have to make a single change in his dispositions—surely a remarkable instance of that insight into an enemy's mind which is rightly held to be among the highest of military qualities. It is recorded that at first Buller perceived the unwisdom of a frontal attack, and prepared that flank march to the north-west which was always open to him. But

Botha always maintained that Buller would attack in front; and he proved right. Really it almost seemed as if Botha subdued Buller to his will.

But Botha left nothing to chance. A day before the attack he had reason to fear that the British had learned the detail of his central trenches on Fort Wylie from a spy. Without a moment's delay Botha evacuated the old lines and dug an entirely fresh trench system at a new angle, leaving in the abandoned defences a row of shining guns of corrugated iron, asking for bombardment. Safely ensconced in their new trenches the Republicans watched the British shells bursting over these gaping innocents, with every evidence of an admirable system of intelligence.

All through these hours Botha imposed absolute silence on the 6,000 Burghers awaiting the attack, forbidding them to fire a shot even in the battle itself until a signal gun had sounded from the top of Fort Wylie.

Lying in these trenches, Botha's men had no mean position to defend. Behind—the mountain; in front—a river in full flood; and, beyond the river, an open field of fire. The mountains—those tangled flat-topped South African hills which teem with unexpected hiding-places; the river—that devious Tugela, as erratic as that Mæander which perplexed the Greeks on the plains of Troy, and here boldly embracing Botha's defences in one great bold loop before trending northwards. Across the river to the south—the village of Colenso, through which runs the railway that linked Ladysmith with Durban. Botha had destroyed the railway bridge, but had left a footbridge, as if inviting the British army to cross. That was, in fact, precisely what he wanted.

Across the river eastward stood a hill, Hlangwane, which obviously commanded the whole position. So reluctant were the Boer commandos to be cut off by the river from their main body that Botha at first in vain ordered them to occupy Hlangwane. Not until he had obtained from Kruger and Joubert at Pretoria telegraphic orders that the hill should be held at all costs did the recalcitrant commandos consent to obey. Then lots were drawn and one valiant body from Wakkerstrom, together with some volunteers, crossed the river and seized the hill. Of such strange material, fluid as a rope of sand, was the discipline of these soldier-farmers who were now to astound the world.

Far away to the westward, along the banks of the Tugela where it runs from west to east, behind a grove of poplar trees and in trenches dug along the roots of the hills, lay the Free Staters and other Transvaal commandos, commanding every inch of the river-banks with the prepared ranges of their deadly Mausers, and supported by artillery concealed in the hills behind.

Botha's full military design on that morning of December 15 was nothing less than that his army should lie forgotten and lost to the world until Buller's whole army had crossed the Tugela. His complete purpose was then to enfold and capture the whole force.

From that worst fate Buller's army was rescued by one of those blunders which, like the cackling of the geese on the Roman Capitol, sometimes save nations.

Very early—shortly after 5 a.m.—on this morning of December 15—a very calm, clear, hot, windless morning of the mid-South African summer—the British forces were in motion, covered by the fire of the naval guns. Three main columns advanced to the attack—Hildyard's in the centre, Hart's on the left, and Dundonald's on the right. These great bodies of men could be seen by the Republicans in every detail as they deployed into open order over a front of six miles. Still not a shot was fired. Then suddenly, without orders, a British artillery officer, Colonel Long, possessed with a new and confident theory of aggressive gunnery, galloped forward in person with his two batteries right ahead of the infantry regiments. He went forward until he had come within rifle range of the Boer trenches,[1] and then proceeded to unlimber. A chance shot from these guns fell into the new Republican trenches; and this incident proved too much for their discipline. The rifles began to go off: and instantly a blaze of rifle fire rapidly acquiring a deadly accuracy converged on the doomed gunners. All the world knows how the remnants of these heroic teams were forced to take refuge in the donga behind; and how during that fearful day, effort after effort was made to save the guns, involving the loss of many heroic lives, including the only son of Lord Roberts. But these gunners by their heroic folly had unmasked the Republican position. Those Englishmen did not die in vain. For the premature outbreak of fire made it finally impossible for the British troops to cross the Tugela, and the attack was stayed on the southern bank. If the Boer riflemen had achieved the greater miracle of restraint, it is not impossible that Buller's army, crowded into a narrow space on the northern bank, might have been annihilated by the concealed fire of many thousands of mobile marksmen.

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[1] The Boers say 1,300 yards. Others say 700.

As Botha stood watching his mighty foe arrested in front of the trap which he had set, he was half subdued to wonder and admiration. For never has the spirit of British courage shone forth more clearly than in that forlorn hour. Botha watched with amazement the wasted daring of the British soldiery. Never—so he has often since declared—had he seen human beings rise to greater heights. Five times the British infantry charged forward before they would yield to that ceaseless, pitiless hail. Sometimes they advanced at a walk in regular order, and when those in front were mowed down those behind simply dropped into the grass and waited for others to come up. Never had the world seen valour so surpassing, so woefully misdirected, so prodigally misspent.

All was in vain. The attack was repulsed; and before the close of that day Buller's army was in full retreat and the guns abandoned. Botha himself was astonished at Buller's collapse when it came. With such material, he expected greater efforts. But the close of the fight was in keeping with the excess of confidence that saw its opening. Not for the first time in history were the professionals of war utterly discomfited by the discovery that an amateur, too, can sometimes fight.

Botha had now shown that he could mould the Boers into a great defensive force. But not yet could he forge them into a weapon for attack. Not even he could persuade them to attack Buller before he could recover from his blow. The Republicans idly waited behind the river until the British Army, refreshed and restored, made another attempt to break through the blockade of Ladysmith.

This time the blow was struck, after much fumbling, in the tangle of hills to the south-west of the Ladysmith plain. It was here—at Spion Kop—that Botha became the hero of another famous fight.

Spion Kop—the "Scout's Hill"—is a flat-topped eminence which rises high above its fellows; and it presents certain conspicuous advantages for attack which caught the imagination of soldiers still dazed by the Colenso reverse. By a gallant stroke of arms the hill was seized in thick fog during the night of January, 23-24, 1900, and the Boer commandos encamped to the north awoke to find themselves most perilously dominated. Worn out by days of fighting, those commandos "inspanned" their oxen and hastened to retire in order to escape the imminent shell fire from the captured hill. It really seemed as if the lines were pierced.

It was at that moment that a few bolder spirits, chief among them Botha and Schalk Burger, rallied the younger men, shifted the guns under cover of the still lingering mists, organised a small "forlorn hope,"[1] and launched them on an assault of the hill. The attacks continued throughout that fearful day of blood, and Botha manfully supported them with fire from his guns. But by nightfall the assault was held up. Both sides were tired out. The British infantry had the advantage. They still held Spion Kop. They had also captured the "Twin Peaks," which fully opened the door to Ladysmith. In vain. Once more the victories of British valour were undone by lack of British generalship. Those splendid stormers, the Rifles, were called off from the "Twin Peaks" by Buller; and in the shielding darkness of that night—January 24-25—the gallant Thorneycroft, starved of supports, exhausted by incredible losses, refused to face another day of such shell fire, and abandoned the top of the hill.

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[1] Some 350 men from Carolina.

All through the day Botha had stood on a small hillock down in the plain directing his men and his guns. When darkness fell, he descended from the hillock to eat and rest. He was not at that moment very hopeful. The greater number of the Boer fighters had scattered towards Ladysmith, exhausted and hopeless of victory. Most of his own men had gone, and only a scanty remnant remained. A few small parties of stalwarts hung on to the foot of the mountain, waiting to resume the fight on the morrow. Botha and his staff refused to desert them. He waited.

Botha knew that his enemies had suffered very severely. He had an instinct that they would abandon the summit. He telegraphed so to Joubert. He truly had the uncanny Wellington faculty of knowing what "the other fellow was thinking of on the other side of a hill."

At 3.30 a.m. the whisper came from the Republican scouts that the summit was empty. Others crawled up to prospect; and the whisper became a shout. At 4.20 a.m. Botha went up himself. He found there, on the flat-top of that blood-stained, hard-fought mountain, not a single British fighting man. Standing there, in that dawn, alone in the midst of that terrible acre of British dead and wounded, he looked down on the valleys to the south and saw the rising sun touch with his light the snowy tents of that great British army, so splendid in its valour, so proud in its numbers and equipment, so paralysed by defect of commanding will and brain.

Is it wonderful that, standing there, Botha saw in this scene the act of some Power higher than any of this world?

> "O God, thy arm was here,
> And not to us, but to thy arm alone,
> Ascribe we all!"[1]

If our Henry thought so at Agincourt, Botha may be excused for thinking so on the summit of Spion Kop.

After the battle a British chaplain sent to fetch wounded men met Botha seated on horseback, and talked with him on the field. Botha allowed him to remove, not only the wounded British soldiers from the hill-top, but those also in the field hospital—asking only for reciprocity. Returning, the chaplain conversed with many of the rank and file, who stood contemplating the dead British soldiers with a sadness amounting, in his own phrase, to anguish. "My God! What a sight!" "I wish politicians could see their handiwork!" Such were the reflections of the farmer-soldiers on that stricken field.

Botha was to find all his efforts vain. Happily for us, there was bad leadership on the Boer side as well as on the British; and Botha was not yet in a position of supreme command. Perhaps even he had not yet fully realised the importance of increasing aggression in modern warfare.

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[1] *Henry V.*

Buller was let off again. The Boers—to the infinite amazement of German witnesses[1]—allowed him to draw off unpunished his cumbrous transport and encumbered army; and at long last, after trying every false approach, he was left to discover by sheer process of exhaustion the true way of attack by the hills to the east. There, on Pieters Hill, Botha, embarrassed by a divided command, appealing in vain for help to Pretoria, fought his last fight in defence of the Ladysmith blockade. The small force of heroes left to him, exposed on rocks that could not be trenched, melted away under the hell of the lyddite shells. Those that survived fought till they could not see from fatigue. But when the final crisis came it was not at Botha's point of the line that the defence cracked. He called in vain for reinforcements: in vain did he point out the weak link in the chain of defence. At that point the valorous charges of the impetuous British infantry—Irish, Scotch, and English joined in splendid rivalry—at last forced a break in that iron leaguer.

Outflanked and threatened with utter destruction, Botha sullenly retired, and the commandos fell away from Ladysmith in a retreat which it would have required little British generalship to convert into a rout. But that generalship was again lacking; and so Lukas Meyer and Botha were allowed to shield the panic-stricken torrent of Boer fugitives and to reform the shattered fragments of their broken commandos.

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[1] See the German Official Account of the War in South Africa. Translated by Colonel Du Cane (John Murray), p. 178.

At that moment the Republican cause seemed already lost. Out of the blackness which on that day of defeat shrouded the Boer cause, one star of hope alone flickered—the star of Louis Botha.

CHAPTER V

THE WAR IN FLOOD (1900)

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"That island of England breeds very valiant creatures: their mastiffs are of unmatchable courage."—HENRY V.

IN the great war of defence which developed after the fall of Ladysmith three great figures emerged on the Boer side, commanding and heroic—Botha, De Wet, and De la Rey. After the war I met these men, and had good opportunities for observing their characters as they had been developed by the war.

De Wet was certainly much the most impressive of the three. Never did I set eyes on a man who seemed to stand so much alone. His face was a study in resistance—it recalled one of those graven visages which one sees far up the Nile, hewn out of the very rocks, ancient leaders in that land of Africa. His body then seemed all muscle—thickset, pillar-like in its erectness, "four-square to all the winds that blow." Looking on him, one could understand the fear that he inspired in his own men, when he rode on through the night, wrapped in his own thoughts, devising one of those schemes of escape, almost miraculous in their cunning, which perplexed an Empire and puzzled a planet.

He spoke only in Dutch, and then only in few words. He still regarded all Englishmen with a dour reserve that rarely softened or melted. Only on one or two occasions have I seen his face light up with enthusiasm, and that was always when he recalled one of his own achievements in evasion.

Out of all those descriptions, one still stands out in my memory. One evening, after a long day's march —so he told us—all his wanderings seemed to have come to an end. The lights of the British bivouac fires twinkled from every point of the horizon. De Wet, as was his wont, went apart from his men : he sat alone in dumb despair. Then there came to him softly one of those wonderful scouts who served him so well. This scout had discovered a slight gap in the British lines, between two regiments who were not quite keeping touch. In a moment, De Wet was on his feet. Within an hour every horse's foot was muffled with cloth or wool, and every wagon-wheel was swathed. The Boer camp fires were lighted and were left burning brightly. Then the whole Boer force crept out through the darkness of the night in utter silence, penetrated the gap in the British lines, and started on a new career of fugitive and elliptical warfare.[1]

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[1] This is the escape of De Wet referred to in the "*Times* History of the War in South Africa," Vol. V, p. 145.

No one who ever heard De Wet tell such stories could ever forget. For he told them in sharp, short phrases that expressed the very quickness and shrewdness of action that marked his great deeds.

De la Rey was in amiable contrast to this man. Benevolence shone from every feature. Although still under sixty at that time, he was already in appearance a veteran with a flowing beard, and kindly, grandfatherly eyes. Anybody less like a guerilla leader I have never set eyes on. He was more like a warm-hearted Norfolk farmer, the popular chairman of a weekly market ordinary. He was as kindly in speech as in appearance. He was always on honourable terms with his enemies in the field. There was an affecting meeting between him and Roberts after Colenso, where each lost a son. I remember his phrase about Lord Methuen, whom he captured and tended. "Methuen was," said De la Rey, "a perfect Christian knight—there could not be a nobler gentleman." "But he burnt your farm!" cried one in the company. "Oh! that was war!" he said gently. "Just war!" He seemed to think that that word covered many things.

Apart from both these two stood Louis Botha—always the Boer, but the Boer of affairs, the Boer who had been brought into touch with the outer and larger world. He conversed readily: his smile was always friendly. He aimed at conciliation. He was a soldier, but also a statesman. Alone among them he was already a man of the great world. He was already pursuing a policy—a policy of unity. Above all, he convinced one that he was a man of his word.

At that time (1902) his was an alert and soldierly figure, less substantial in build than to-day. He could speak English, but he preferred to talk Dutch. The impression left was that of a keen foe and a good friend—one to be trusted in peace and feared in war.

This was the man who was now destined to become the chief war leader of the Boers in the two years of struggle which still remained.

Already in March, 1900, the Boer cause had been thrown definitely on to the defensive. The main army of the Free Staters under General Cronje had been captured at Paardeberg (February 27). This Boer disaster was followed by battles in which for the first time the armies of the Free State retreated without due cause; and on March 13 Lord Roberts was able to enter Bloemfontein. During the same weeks the armies of the Transvaal withdrew from Natal with a swiftness that seemed likely at any moment to become a rout. Distant observers may be pardoned for having thought that the main resistance of the war was now over.

But then came a sudden and surprising recovery. De Wet allowed his men to go home and refresh. Botha and Lukas Meyer withdrew their armies unbroken, without any effective pursuit from the British, from Natal. The Boer Governments opened negotiations and offered to accept peace on any terms short of annexation. The British Government definitely announced that they would fight until the Boers surrendered their independence. The Boer Governments refused; and instantly made a new striking appeal to their peoples to defend their independence.

From that moment the war entered on a new phase. It now became—what it was before only in part—emphatically a war of freedom, arousing in the Boer the deepest passion of his nature—the passion to be captain of his own land and soul.

And yet, in spite of this revival, it seemed as if Lord Roberts, now at the head of a great and growing army, must inevitably carry all before him. In the course of the next few months he was able to relieve Mafeking (May 17), and then, advancing along the main railway line with his chief forces, he entered Johannesburg (May 31) and Pretoria (June 5). But meanwhile it became clear that in South Africa the capitals are not the country. Even while these great operations were going forward the Boer recovery had begun. It soon appeared that conquest was not the same as occupation.

First came that rapid sequence of lightning blows which made the name of De Wet a thing of awe—the ambush of Sannah's Post (March 31), the capture of Reddersburg (April 3), the siege of Wepener (April 25), and worst of all, on the very day that Lord Roberts entered Johannesburg, the extensive surrender of Imperial Yeomanry at Lindley in the Free State (May 31).

Meanwhile, Botha was steadily and cautiously preparing for the next great defensive of the Transvaal. Joubert died on March 27. Botha succeeded him, and now took over complete command of the Transvaal forces as Commandant-General. After the capture of Bloemfontein by Lord Roberts, President Kruger ordered him in that capacity to bring the Transvaal commandos from the borders of Natal in order to oppose the British advance. Botha therefore peremptorily recalled his men from their leave, and on May 7 arrived at Virginia Siding with 3,000 burghers to defend Kroonstadt. Here, on May 10, General French swept round his right and forced him to retire and leave Kroonstadt in British hands. Botha secured his retreat; but for the moment the Republicans were given over to one of those panics which periodically seized them. The Free Staters refused to leave their own country undefended; and at a joint Council of War it was decided to separate the armies, leaving the Free Staters south of the Vaal, to be commanded by De Wet, while Botha retired north in face of the advancing British hosts, who were now marching forward at great speed under Lord Roberts.

On May 7, at Pretoria, there took place the last sitting of the old Volksraad. All the usual pomp was observed: the Consuls and Attachés of Foreign Powers attended in their uniforms; President Kruger, in his scarf of office and white gloves, addressed them for the last time, bidding them be of good courage. Streamers of crêpe and wreaths of immortelles lay on the empty chairs of the fallen Generals and members.[1] The Vierkleur lay across the seat of the captured Cronje.

But, amid all these signs of proud resistance, everyone present knew that the Transvaal Government had decided to abandon the capital. Desperate schemes were afoot. The old President wished to raise revenue by a general sale of underground mining rights; but the Chamber was against him—an ominous sign of the national weakening produced by the pomp and glamour of finance. Then there was a proposal to blow up the mines on the approach of Roberts. Botha, always a steady opponent of "frightfulness" in war, strenuously resisted this proposal, and threatened to lay down his command if the attempt were made.

Then Roberts leapt forward with one great spring at the heart of the Transvaal. Botha retired steadily, forced to detach some of his best fighters to oppose Buller, but now reinforced heavily from other quarters of the field of war.[2] With a mixed force of 4,000, he made a big stand for Johannesburg at Doornkop, where Ian Hamilton and French drove him from the ridges by the dauntless valour of their charging troops, led by the gallant Gordons. Roberts entered Johannesburg; and then, without a pause, marching sixteen miles a day, that great British soldier pressed on for Pretoria, which Botha surrendered to him under the instructions of his Government. On June 5, Botha left the capital to the British, and retired, shielding his retreating Government, along the Delagoa Railway. Then there opened some strange negotiations at the country house of a Transvaal Jew, Mr. Samuel Marks, where the Boer Generals met and half dallied with the idea of peace. But the news of De Wet's successes changed the whole mood of the Transvaalers, and Botha broke off the negotiations by announcing his intention to give battle to Lord Roberts. And so began the great struggle of Berg-en-Dal, or Dalmanutha, the last set battle of the Boer War (June 11–13).

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[1] Generals Joubert and Kock: burghers Barnard and Joser.

[2] He sent the Wakkerstrom Boers to Laing's Nek; but he was joined by Viljoen, and by the forces set free by the capture of Mafeking, and by the evacuation of Natal.

There, on a position thirty miles long that ran right across the great range of the Western Transvaal, Botha fought a great battle against the combined attack of French, Ian Hamilton, and Bruce Hamilton, directed from Pretoria by Roberts, who, even in the very midst of the battle-thunder, was still playing with the hopes of peace.[1]

It was in the onslaught on Botha's far-flung line—6,000 men along 30 miles—that the British Commander in those days of June anticipated the German generalship of a later day, achieving success by the overwhelming concentration of guns on a small section of the line of defence. Against these tactics Botha employed the method of extreme mobility. By exceedingly skilful handling of his commandos, Botha constantly managed to strengthen those parts of this vast line of defence where the enemy was at the moment trying to break through. Here again he anticipated the tactics of a later day. It was only when the swiftness of the British concentration exceeded the swiftness of the Boer defence that the British Generals, with superior forces, drove General Botha's army back. On June 11, the Berg-en-Dal position was attacked in overwhelming force, and the commandos of Dalmanutha were ordered up to its defence. But they arrived too late, and the battle was lost.

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[1] A peace envoy passed from Pretoria to Botha in the middle of the fight.

On the night of June 12, Botha retreated from his lines. Once more, as at Spion Kop, the British Generals were unconscious of their success. They did not know when they had conquered. Finding himself unpursued, Botha withdrew his army during the night.

At this battle, and during the months of 1900, Botha still had artillery, amounting probably to about seventeen guns, three "Long Toms," and about a dozen quick-firers. But the time was now coming when he would cease to have either guns or an army in the full modern sense behind him. He retired slowly and surlily along the line, profiting by the activities of De Wet. The British forces pressed him steadily eastward, until in September he reached the Portuguese frontier. There, in order to avoid internment, he was compelled to abandon and bury his big guns and to scatter and break up his commandos. The less stalwart Boers fled across the frontier and passed out of the war. Botha himself passed north with the core of his fighting forces.

The day of big armies was over. From this time forward Botha distributed his commandos over the country in the district which they themselves best knew, and the war of battles passed into a war of small forces harassing and hindering a bigger enemy. The same change took place in the Free State, where the surrender of 4,000 Boers under Prinsloo in the Ladybrand Basin (July 28) also reduced De Wet to a war of small, swift-moving bands.

Yet in spite of these events the war carried on by Botha for the next two years in the Transvaal was by no means a "guerilla" struggle. Throughout these years he remained Commander-in-Chief of a nation's armies. During the whole period of his command every unoccupied district in the Transvaal had its own Land-drost and Field Cornet; and every commando had its own officers appointed by Botha. He kept up the complete fabric of an army in the field, with three

Assistant-Commandant-Generals—De la Rey, Beyers, and his brother, Christiaan Botha. He kept up throughout constant communication with his scattered forces, which still acted under his orders. He kept the Government of the Republic always in being. When at the last he came to terms with the British forces, he was able to negotiate as the General of an actual Government, and as the chief of armies completely obedient to his commands.

Yet his life during this period had all the romance and colour of a Rob Roy, outlawed and yet defiant, chased and yet chasing, conquered by all the rules of the game but still often victorious over his conquerors. "The power of armies is a visible thing," and it seemed to the outward eye inconceivable that the Boer resistance could go on in face of the great armies which the British Empire now poured into the country from every corner of the world. But South Africa is a land of vast spaces; and all the advantage was to those who knew those spaces as only the Republicans knew them. They were still mounted, and mounted on horses—mostly Basuto ponies—generally two to each man—precisely adapted to the country. There was plenty of valour and skill on both sides in this war between two races of the same stock and the same faith—heroism and chivalry both of British and Dutchman—doggedness of the common stock from which both sides had sprung. But the Burghers had now (from March, 1900, onward) on their side the magic power that belongs to men who defend their own land:—

> "No foot may chase,
> No eye can follow, to a fatal place
> That power, that spirit, whether on the wing
> Like the strong wind, or sleeping like the wind
> Within its awful caves."

It was that spirit which now became a "Will-o'-the-wisp" to the British armies in South Africa.

General Botha has published no record of those days.

He has wished to throw a veil over memories of strife. Even in the bosom of his own family he discourages talk about the old war or revival of its memories. But the British chronicler can afford to glory now in the records of those who were once foes and are now partners. It will even strengthen us to-day to recall the mighty past of those who now help us to sustain the pillars of our fate.

What, then, was the kind of life which was lived by General Botha in the field throughout all these struggles? We must not imagine that it was ever an easy life. These great deeds were not done without sweat and agony. Often these Boer commandos escaped only as by fire. Again and again they emerged from the jaws of their pursuers, breathless, stripped of their possessions, emaciated with long hunger, ragged, almost foodless. They would go for weeks without regular sleep. They lived for long months on "mealies," the food of the Kaffirs. They would often have to beg food from the kraals. After one of the long drives they were often as lean as laths, hollow-cheeked, heavy-eyed with sleeplessness. All but the most stalwart fell away. The married men were often agonised with fear for their wives and children, whether in the dreaded "camps" or at home in the power of the blacks. It was often necessary to let these older men go to look after their families, leaving the young bachelors to carry on the struggle.

Often when the commandos settled down for supper at the end of a day's march, their work was not over. All around them were those vigilant, ebony-skinned neutrals, indifferent as to the issue between their white masters, ready to sell the secrets of either side for cash down. As soon as the sun had set the Boers must be up and off again and march through the pitch night till they had reached another resting-place. Then they could sleep till three to four a.m., but they must be up before the red dawn. "Opsaal, Burghers!" was the cry before the first grey streaks of light on the eastern horizon. Saddled, they would wait till daylight, ready for a dawn attack. Then they would ride on, often halting in the daytime to snatch a few minutes' sleep.

Sometimes so near were pursuers and pursued in these wanderings the Boers would camp on one side of a hill and the British on the other; and the Boers tell us to-day that they felt actually safer for such neighbourhood, because they knew that they were on the blind side of their hunters.

Through all these experiences Botha lived the same life as his men, eating the same food and sharing the same dangers. In fact, it was always his first principle that the Staff should suffer more than the men. He was always ready to give his men rest before himself. He would often send out his own Staff to see where the pursuing columns were. He would sometimes deliberately use himself as a decoy. "It is I they want—not you," he would say to the members of the Transvaal Government, and he would leave them snugly resting in some sheltering valley while he himself would be riding far afield with all the columns in full cry after him.

His main policy was to exhaust the British columns by pursuit while giving them the smallest possible opportunity to capture his men. "No Boer need ever be captured if he does not want to be," was his constant refrain; and he proved it in his own person. Our soldiers, of course, grew quicker and cleverer in this novel warfare, so trying to European troops. But the Boer always had certain great advantages. It was before the day of motors. The British troops had to bring along provision-wagons and guns; and that meant a loss of speed. The Republicans gradually got rid of their wagons. The British horses required oats and hay, but the Boer horse could feed off the veldt;

while the men themselves could live easily on "biltong."

Botha had already displayed before Ladysmith a natural genius for war; and now he developed it in his own characteristic way. It was not the modern, scientific, Teutonised warfare—so little distinguishable from sheer devilry.

Botha, for instance, was then, as now, always humane and chivalrous. He resolutely set his face against burning and devastation, and "broke" one of his officers when he burnt a British farm by way of reprisal in Zululand. He was kind to prisoners, gentle to wounded enemies, chivalrous to captives.

Humane to the foe, he was also humane to his own men. It was, indeed, essential to the Boers that they should spare men. "Twenty-six killed, General," said a messenger from the firing line on the occasion of an attack on trenches. Botha turned swiftly to his aide-de-camp. "Do you hear that?" he cried, and his face was grey with agony. To him it seemed worse than defeat.

There was more of instinct than of method about his whole conduct of the war. He never used a map. He had no scientific theories. But he started with an extraordinary knowledge of the whole countryside—the lie of the land, the signs of water, the distances, the strategical opportunities.

He would be sitting, for instance, one day high on a hill with one of his staff-officers—on a stone just on the right side of the summit, looking through field-glasses over one of those immense expanses of rolling country which can be seen from a South African hill-top. They would be reconnoitring, and they might see, perhaps, two columns in the far blue distances—one marching from north-west to south-east, another from west to east. Very quickly Botha would have worked out the size of the columns, would have calculated the rate of their movements and their length: would have told from the colour of the grass where there was water, and where they would camp. At the end he would say, "At such and such a place they will stay for the night"; "At such and such an hour we will attack." His power of deduction was extraordinary, and it rarely failed. On one occasion, in the Vryheid district, he allowed himself to be overruled by his officers. He transferred his commands from a hill where they were quite safe to another which his officers preferred. The result was that they were attacked and surrounded in the night, and escaped by a bare miracle. It was his nearest shave of capture; and he had allowed his judgment to be overruled.

"He could always find a way round," says one observer. "I don't know how he did it; perhaps he did not know himself," adds the same witness. "His judgment was perfect." The very utterance of such opinions by the men who were with him is evidence of the confidence which he inspired.

In dealing with his own men, his great gift as a leader was his power of composure—

> "Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,
> These three alone lead life to sovereign power."

This is especially true of that fiery atmosphere of war; those who can walk serenely in that furnace are already half-way to victory. It is the evidence of those who were with Botha throughout this war that he was always calm and tranquil. He would listen carefully; he would not speak until he had made up his mind. He was always patient with his men—kindly and long-suffering. He never mistook harshness for firmness.

The Boer military system had neither the virtues nor the faults of European militarism. The Commander-in-Chief was the chosen and appointed leader; the system of service, although compulsory in form, was in the essence voluntary. Its strength was the diffused intelligence of large bodies of men trained to understand individually the aim and object of the fighting in which they risked their lives. Its weakness was want of discipline. But Botha steadily strengthened discipline. He weeded out the weaklings; he gradually tightened the screws of order and method, until in the end these hardy remnants of the armies of the Transvaal, steeled by suffering, were worthy to meet the best troops in the world.

It was by such means that he prolonged the Republican resistance through 1900 and 1901.

CHAPTER VI

THE WAR IN EBB (1901)

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> "This battle fares like to the morning's war,
> When dying clouds contend with growing light;
> What time the shepherd, blowing of his nails,
> Can neither call it perfect day nor night."
>
> —HENRY VI.

By the end of 1901 the war had passed to a grimmer phase. Exasperated by the continued resistance of the Boers, the British Generals had changed from leniency to severity. The country was gradually being laid waste by the operations of a war which was daily becoming more bitter on both sides; for it remains yet to be proved that the subjection of an independent race can ever be achieved by gentle methods.

Justifiable or not, there can be no doubt that these new methods of warfare played a great part in bringing the war to an end. The destruction of the farms deprived the Boers of food; and where everyone might become a soldier, the treatment of the whole population as possible combatants seemed to the men on the spot the only effective counter-measure. In defence of their independence, even the Republican women and children played no negligible part; and it seemed difficult, therefore, to leave them entirely outside the war. Given the political object, the military policy with its farm-burning, concentration camps, and destruction of crops and cattle—what Campbell-Bannerman in a stinging phrase called "methods of barbarism"—seemed to the soldiers practically inevitable.[1]

In pursuance of this policy, Lord Kitchener now brought his full organising genius to bear on the systematic devastation and depopulation of the country. He built elaborate lines of those famous block-houses which were to complete the process. Great columns of British troops "netted" the country and drove the population, with their flocks and herds, up against these lines. De Wet, in his bitter scorn, called the block-houses "block-heads," and Botha often walked through and round them; but in spite of that they undoubtedly played a great part in bringing the war to an end.

For the result of these block-houses was that by the end of 1901 the Boer forces no longer possessed any organised commissariat or transport; and the two central commands could maintain their organisation only by slender and precarious filaments of despatch-riders. The armies in the field were gradually reduced to a number of small, scattered forces, often audaciously and splendidly aggressive—even up to the very suburbs of Cape Town—but gradually, as the months wore on, more and more isolated from the centre, and more and more dependent for resistance on the ammunition which they could capture from our troops, and the food they could buy from the Kaffirs, or from the few remaining white farmers.

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[1] Lord Milner was opposed to it, and Mr. Chamberlain never liked it. The policy of devastation was laid down by Lord Kitchener in a Memorandum dated Pretoria, December 21, 1900. ("*Times* History," Vol. V, p. 86.)

Precisely as new districts were devastated, the country in which they could operate became "small by degrees and beautifully less"; and as the spheres of war became fewer and smaller, the British columns could be concentrated more effectually on the remaining districts. All the time the risks of capture became steadily greater for the remaining commandos. Week by week the rumours of death and disease in the concentration camps carried woe into the commandos, and led to the gradual thinning of the fighting ranks.

It was Botha's fixed policy to continue his resistance as long as there was even the faintest glimmer of hope for Republican freedom. With a mind always open to the faintest whispers of "peace with honour," he tuned up his troops to uttermost resistance, and he abated no jot of the rigours of war.

Several times during this year (1901) he was very nearly captured. There was one day when his surrender seemed inevitable. He had been driven with his Staff and about two hundred men right to the edge of the "High Veldt" of the Eastern Transvaal, where the high ground breaks down in low hills and long valleys to the lower country. They were hanging on to the extreme edge of the high country like rooks on the edge of a wood.

On that afternoon, at 4 p.m., the Boer scouts came in with the news that the enemy were closing in upon them from north, west, and south in columns that would reach them within a few hours. The Republicans looked down across the plain and could see the rays of the sun glittering on the roofs of a long line of block-houses. It looked as if Botha had absolutely no chance of escape, and that very afternoon a report reached London that it was fully expected that he would be captured on the morrow. But Botha acted with the utmost coolness. He decided that he would descend to the plain as soon as the dusk allowed his men to move without being discerned from the block-houses; and he designed to escape later on into the Vryheid district which he knew so well. There was an old road, no longer used for heavy wagons, but still practicable for horse riders, leading to a ford across the Buffalo River. This ford was supposed to lie between two block-houses that stood about a mile apart. Boer scouts were sent ahead to find out whether that road was still open, and they reported that it was.

As soon as darkness fell, Botha and his men descended the slopes eastwards along the old road. During that descent they were joined by some very embarrassing recruits. At that period a number of Republican farmers who had been driven from their farms were tramping up and down the high veldt with herds of cattle which they hoped to save from the columns. They got wind of Botha's march and joined him in his descent. Their one object was to trek away from the British Army; and as it is the fixed rule of the Boer people to help one another, General Botha could not prevent these farmers from joining him. So this strange column started off—soldiers, farmers, cattle, sheep—surely the most conglomerate host that ever faced peril since the days of Moses. Either they had to get through that night or, if they were held up by the block-houses, they would be found spread out on the open plain in broad daylight and inevitably captured. The whole host moved on for some hours and then halted to let the scouts go ahead and cut the wires. The commando stood still and waited for the return of the wire-cutters. The pause seemed an eternity. Then at this critical moment the great mass of cattle became deeply disturbed. Cows began to low, sheep to bleat, and horses to neigh. Anger and despair seized upon the commando. A sound of shots came through the darkness and they seemed to come from three sides, although it turned out that they came from the front only. But there, in the darkness, the Boers seemed to be waiting for certain death.

At that moment the Boer scouts came riding back announcing that they had found a new block-house erected a few paces from the ford which they had to cross. This new block-house, erected right on the brink of the water, made the gap so narrow that it seemed impossible for the Republican column to pass through, especially as all the block-houses were now aroused by the noises of the cattle and were firing fiercely.

But Botha decided to go straight forward, relying upon the notorious difficulty of shooting straight in the dark. He sent forward a few dozen men to attack the new block-house—some to approach it from the west and the others to cross the ford and to open fire from the other side of the river—with the governing object of distracting attention from his own column. Then the whole confused procession of Republicans and cattle were set in motion, and moved forward through the gap cut in the triple line of wires. The new block-house kept up a continual fire on them from almost point-blank range. One who was marching with Botha has described to me the effects of these shots as of constant blows on the top of his head. But the night was very dark, and the blows were not yet actual wounds or death.

Botha rode forward on a big white horse without quickening his pace. Next to him on the left rode his little son of fourteen years, the younger Louis. Botha himself sat erect, as unconcerned as if nothing were happening; but he had ordered his boy to lie forward on his own horse and he was so riding as to shield the child with his body. The Republicans could not fire and could not gallop. They were moving in double file and in darkness. The front men, in descending the slope to the water's edge and in wading through the river, had to go slow; and therefore, to avoid panic, those who were behind must go slow also. This they did with amazing self-restraint, and not a single file in that column quickened its speed until the whole column was through. The extraordinary thing is that, according to credible witnesses, Botha did not on that night lose a single man. The only loss was that of a Kaffir boy, who got a shot in the leg, and of some few cattle and horses, who got frightened and caught in the barbed wire.[1]

It was a strange life for civilised men—this Arab-like wandering over the great veldt. It must not be imagined that all the days were full of thrills. There were long dull seasons when they had shaken off the pursuing columns, and were lying lost to sight and memory in some hidden nook of the hills, guarded by vigilant scouts and attempting to rest their tired horses and replenish their exhausted provisions. At such seasons the hours dragged slowly, and every device of recreation was precious. Botha was at that time a fine whist player, just as he is now reputed to be the best player of auction bridge in South Africa. But sometimes even the packs of cards would be lost in one of their rapid escapes. On one occasion an assistant military secretary cleverly manufactured a pack of cards out of a large piece of cardboard, with sketchy drawings of fancy kings, queens, and knaves. The only defect of this pack was that it could not be shuffled. After a time they took to shuffling the pack as men shuffle domino-stones, on a flat surface. They had intended to present that strange pack of cards to a Museum if it had survived the war, but unfortunately it was "lost in the foray," and they had to manufacture a new pack out of large pieces of paper, which were by no means so convenient. But by that time Botha himself had given up playing whist. He had discovered that the old Boers looked askance at his cards; and rather than offend his followers he gave up this diversion.

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[1] This great feat is alluded to, but not described, in the "*Times* History," Vol. V, p. 460.

Every kind of life brings its own compensation, and perhaps, after all, these long months on the veldt endowed these Boers with a stock of health that was to last for life. It was a kind of "return to nature." They could not read, and they could not write. What better rest-cure for modern men? I remember one of these fighters telling me—as soldiers do now on return from a larger front—that the real terror of civil life was having to sleep in a bed and under a roof.

After the war Botha often affirmed that his men enjoyed better health than in times of peace. They knew where to rest and they knew what to drink. Their food was simple to the point of the elemental; at any rate, they escaped that not infrequent malady of a high civilisation—the habit of over-eating. It is interesting now to note that the men between forty and fifty stood the life as well as the younger men, and Botha once told me that the best fighters of all in his army were his "boys"—the young fellows between fourteen and twenty. The men who really suffered were the fathers and grandfathers, who had to endure anxiety for absent and helpless families.

During such weeks of pause their occupation was a simple one. It was to watch for a weak spot in the scattered British lines, and then to make a surprise attack. One day it would be a convoy and on another it would be a block-house. The great thing was to descend swiftly and without warning, to destroy and then to escape with the least possible loss. Those were thrilling, electric moments in the general boredom of war.

The 85,000 men which was the total fighting strength of the Republicans at the opening of the war were all this time gradually dwindling away, while the British Army was daily increasing. The Boers were wholly cut off from the sea, and shut in from the surrounding countries on land. Only the remoteness of their country from Great Britain and the difficulties of transport gave them any chance at all. The desperate hope of European intervention had gradually faded away. The German Emperor had failed them. The British Navy still commanded the situation. And yet the extraordinary fact remains that up to the very last those scattered, harassed remnants were amazingly confident of victory.

It was in 1901 that Mrs. Louis Botha began to play the woman's part as peacemaker between the fighting Generals. At great risk to herself, travelling in the midst of war, this brave woman acted as peace messenger between Lord Kitchener and General Botha of that year. She took a verbal message from Lord Kitchener to General Botha, and brought back a letter which resulted in that famous meeting at Middelburg in March, 1901, which was really the first overture of peace. The Middelburg terms came into the world before their time; but they were in substance very near to those which were finally accepted in the Treaty of Vereeniging. Lord Kitchener already showed that genius for peacemaking which stands so high among his qualities, and he might have had better fortune if other influences, both at home and in South Africa, had not stiffened and hardened the terms which he originally proposed.[1] Lord Kitchener always believed that he could have obtained peace in March of 1901 if he had been allowed a free hand. But the stubborn fact stood out that the Republicans were not yet ready to give up their independence. Their resistance had not reached the breaking point.

One governing principle ruled the policy of General Botha and those other Transvaal leaders who knew all the facts and could look far ahead. It was that as long as there was the faintest ray of hope that they might preserve a single shred or tatter of their independence, they must fight on. Once that hope were to disappear, then they must make the best terms they could as a Government rather than leave their peoples to the uncovenanted rigours of unconditional surrender.

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[1] See the White Papers (Cd. 528, Cd. 546, Cd. 663). In the crisis of the Vereeniging Conference the British Government revived the Middelburg offer.

In 1901 the moment of hopelessness did not seem yet to have come. There was still, it seemed to them, just the faintest fighting chance. So they returned to the veldt; and the only actual result of the meeting at Middelburg was that Botha issued a rousing appeal to the commandos for a new and more desperate resistance. "Let us," he wrote, "as Daniel in the lions' den, place our trust in God alone; for in His time and in His way He will certainly give us deliverance."[1]

It was clear that Botha, too, could well talk the daily language of the Republican peoples when he wanted to touch the deepest springs of feeling.

If General Botha did not despair of war, Mrs. Botha did not despair of peace. The perseverance of this noble woman as a peacemaker is one of the most romantic and thrilling episodes in the last phases of this war. General Botha was not always in a mood to listen, and there were moments when he by no means welcomed the coming of the messenger of peace. On one occasion Mrs. Botha had travelled for three days to reach her husband with a new suggestion from the British headquarters. Arriving in the Republican lines, she asked that her presence should be reported to the General. At first they did not know where to find Botha; but at last he was found walking up and down in some agitation. Faced by his wife, he said to her instantly: "You must leave me." He had just arranged a battle. "You must get back as soon as you can," he said. "I am blowing up the line!"

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[1] Ermelo, March 15, 1901.

She had gone only a few miles when the shrapnel fell all around her. She came back into the British lines and reported herself to the British General who had let her through. He told her to get back to Pretoria. "But my husband is going to blow up the railway," she remarked. "He won't blow it up if you are on it," replied the British General with some plausibility, and so she went. She travelled in a train full of soldiers; but her presence on the train did not change her husband's Spartan purpose. The line was blown up and the train stopped. The soldiers marched off; Mrs. Botha and a companion were left for three days with the engine-driver and the stoker. During most of that time they played cards, and at the end the men asked her for a favour. "Ours is a risky job," they said, "and anything may happen to us with your husband still about. Will you write us a letter to say we have treated you well?" So Mrs. Botha wrote them the letter for which they asked. Later in the war one of them was captured, and was excellently treated by the Republicans as a reward for his kindness to Mrs. Botha. Shrewd fellows, those railway men!

As the year of 1901 wore to a close a strange situation developed in the field. The Republicans were winning more victories than ever before, and yet their chances of final success in the war were growing steadily less. During the South African summer of 1901–2 (between September and March), they dealt the British forces some resounding blows. In the Western Transvaal De la Rey had completely remodelled his army, and now had behind him some of the sturdiest fighters that the world has seen since the days of Cromwell. There was the fierce and bloody attack on a British column at Moedwil Farm on September 29th, when General Kekewich was wounded and two hundred British soldiers were put out of action; there was the resolute attack on a column under Colonel Von Donop at Kleinfontein. But the greatest blow of all came from Botha at Bakenlaagte, in October, when that brave and daring soldier, Colonel Benson, was killed, and Botha led two thousand horsemen to the defeat and annihilation of Benson's rearguard. This was one of Botha's greatest military achievements. It is still regarded in military history as a model of swift and effective shock-victory.

Never, indeed, did the Boer name stand higher for pure military achievement during these last months of the war. As the months of the South African summer wore away their scattered forces became more and more daring. Down in the Orange Free State, in the early morning of Christmas Day, De Wet stormed the precipice of Tweefontein by night and destroyed a force of Imperial Yeomanry. On February 24, in the Eastern Transvaal, De la Rey attacked and scattered a column under Colonel Anderson at Izerspruit, and finally, on March 7, his commandos, now trained to the discipline of the finest cavalry regiments, smashed and pulverised a column marching under Lord Methuen, who was himself wounded and captured.

But ultimate success in war depends on many things besides victory on the field of battle. Victory must be supported by material resources in men, money, food, and war material. It was the essence of the situation that both by sea and by land the Republicans were cut off from all chance of replenishment in any of these factors of success. The valour of their commandos was never higher, and the striking power of their forces never greater. But their material reserves were gradually and surely dwindling down to the vanishing point. During the early months of 1902, Lord Kitchener had organised his military "drives" on a colossal scale. The British columns had swept bare great spaces of the two Republics. Within these spaces it was now impossible for the commandos to operate; for Lord Kitchener did his work with great thoroughness.

While abating no jot of resistance, Botha all through these days still steadily kept an eye and ear open to every chance of peace. As General in command of the Transvaal, he received reports from all districts, and therefore he was not deceived like many of the Boers by the brilliancy of their achievements in the field. He received daily news of the bitter sufferings of his people, and he knew that there were districts where the commandos were unable to continue their resistance. He shared the extreme Boer susceptibility to the cry of their suffering families; and he knew only too well what that suffering meant. Perhaps the most significant fact of all that became known to him was the gradual swing of the Kaffirs against the Boers. Here was an ominous indication of the new opinion of these black spectators, hitherto in the main neutral, as to the final outcome of the war. But this change threw a very black shadow over the future. There was, for instance, the terrible news from the Western Transvaal of an armed Kaffir commando that had taken the field against the Republicans in spite of the policy of the British Government not to make use of black aid in this war. Worst of all, there came rumours of increased peril to the women and children still on the farms—peril from this awful spectre which ever haunts the consciousness of white South Africa, and blanches the cheek of the bravest husband or father.

On this situation Botha looked out with the masterly coolness that always gave him his power over events. Rather than see his race destroyed, he was always ready to surrender on terms. Then, even if independence were lost, the race could be kept alive. He was not in favour of a resistance that would imperil the existence of his race.

Had the point yet come at which that peril was already in sight?

Not even William of Orange, in the most desperate days of an even mightier struggle, could have been faced with a more difficult question. It required all the calmness of a shrewd, wary mind, exercised in the most tranquil circumstances. Yet it was in the midst of daily peril and escape that Louis Botha had to decide this great issue for the future of his race. Happily for the Republicans, Botha was possessed then, as now, of a great fund of serenity. Nothing could shake or upset him. This tranquillity of soul was expressed in many ways—especially and most notably in an extraordinary reserve of utterance. In war, violence of language seems to proceed as a miasma from violence of action; and the best of men become, in Flanders and elsewhere, hard swearers. Botha, on the contrary, rarely, even in the most extreme trials of these months, used a choleric word.

Perhaps the story which best illustrates this rare self-control over the tongue is one which has been told me in regard to the fighting which took place in June, 1900, east of Pretoria.

One day, in the midst of that bitter fighting, far up on the 'High Veldt,' on a very windy day, a spark dropped by a Kaffir set fire to the grass. The flame, sweeping over the plain, reached, with its swift, fiery tongues, the personal headquarters tent of General Botha, devouring, before they could be removed, all his own personal belongings—saddles, blankets, rifles, and even his private store of ammunition. His own coach, with his private papers and most intimate belongings, was barely dragged across a stream, and just saved from the fire.

At the time of this accident, Botha was away from his camp, directing an attack. When the messenger came to tell him, he listened and said nothing. His only sign of feeling was that he grew very pale. The accident meant much to him. By one piece of carelessness, the last reserve of comfort was snatched from his life. Yet no word of anger escaped him then, or at any other time on that day. Only, at the end of the day, when his work in the field was done, he turned to his staff and said with a sigh: "Well, let's go back to that ash-heap!" The strange thing is that still to-day one at least of his officers remembers this remarkably mild utterance as perhaps the bitterest phrase that he uttered in the course of those bitter days.

Well was it for South Africa that at this crisis in her fate she possessed a son so serene and clear-sighted. This it was that enabled him to recognise the moment for peace before it was too late to make terms.

It was quite early in 1902, perhaps along with the influences of Christmas-time and the New Year, that the first white light of this dawn of peace stole along the horizon of the black and stormy sky of South

Africa. The origins of this new dawn have still a deep human and dramatic interest. The incidental opening was due to the apparently hopeless efforts of a private English gentleman, a member of the Society of Friends, bearing the honoured name of Fox.[1] Mr. Francis Fox had little encouragement from any party or section of Englishmen when he started upon his errand. The "Bitter-enders" were still very strong in London—stronger even than in the Transvaal. But beneath the surface there had set in that deep, remorseful fatigue which the violence of war so often brings in its train. The brilliant oration of Lord Rosebery at Chesterfield in December, 1901, had recently provided a centre round which various peace influences might respectably gather. While doggedly adhering to the policy of annexation, the British people were now inclined to grant the Boers any terms short of independence. The enemy had won British respect; and respect is the first step towards conciliation.

What was wanted was a bridge-builder—a friendly Power that would say the first word to bring together two races cut off by all the misunderstanding and brutalities of prolonged bloodshed.

It was just here that Mr. Francis Fox came in. He conceived the idea of persuading the Dutch Government to act as friendly mediator under the well-known "Mediation" clause in the Hague Convention.[1]

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[1] See "A Brief Narrative of Some Recent Historical Incidents in connection with the Promotion of Peace," by Francis William Fox (London: West, Newman and Co., 1909).

On such occasions there are always mountains of fear and pride to be removed; and only faith will do the miracle. Mr. Fox journeyed to and fro between the Hague and London. He approached the Dutch Prime Minister and the Dutch Court and found them reluctant to be drawn in. He returned to London and approached the chiefs of the British Government. He found Mr. Chamberlain implacable. But Lord Lansdowne, representing the Foreign Office, and perhaps aware of other world complications besides South Africa, was friendly. Lord Salisbury was almost eager. All that remained was mainly a question of etiquette. Foreign intervention, of course, would be impossible; but there was still the blessed word "mediation." With all its faults, diplomacy has still discovered some soothing charms for the pride and prudery of governments.

The upshot was that the Dutch Prime Minister visited London to see the "Dutch Masters" at the National Gallery—an admirable collection, well worthy of his attention. In a visit which Lord Rosebery wittily compared to a casual call at "a wayside inn," Dr. Kuyper was happily able to satisfy himself that the British Government would welcome a friendly letter; and the result was a despatch sent by the Netherlands Government to Lord Lansdowne on

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[1] Article III of Part I, Second Peace Conference (1907), Cd. 3857.

February 25.[1] The letter proposed mediation, or as an alternative the return of the Continental Boer Delegates to South Africa. In his reply Lord Lansdowne refused both proposals; and, to the casual eye, that did not appear very hopeful. But in diplomacy things are not always what they seem. For at the time of his reply Lord Lansdowne casually made a new proposal—that the British Government would be quite willing to receive in a friendly spirit direct overtures from the Boer leaders in South Africa.

This was just the opening that the Dutch Government was aiming after. It removed the technical difficulty produced by the banishment proclamation recently issued by the British Government against the Boer Generals—that there was no one officially existent on the Republican side to negotiate with.

So the letters were telegraphed to South Africa. They were communicated by Lord Kitchener to the Boer leaders, and the result was that the acting President of the Transvaal, Schalk Burger, communicated to Lord Kitchener his desire to consult the President of the Orange Free State as to his reply.

It was nearly two weeks before President Steyn could be found on the "illimitable veldt." But at last he was tracked down; and then, at Klerksdorp in the Orange Free State, there opened the first of those critical and difficult discussions which were to bring back peace to South Africa.

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[1] Cd. 906.

CHAPTER VII

PEACE (1902)

CHAPTER VII

PEACE (1902)

"A peace is of the nature of a conquest:
For then both parties nobly are subdued,
And neither party loses."
HENRY IV, Part II, Act IV, Sc. II.

THE part which General Botha had to play in the great Peace Conferences which followed upon the overture of the Netherlands Government was not by any means easy. He had to deal with a situation acutely difficult and perilous. His own people were now scattered like sheep over the spaces of the great veldt, and he was their only shepherd. His responsibility was very great. It was his first duty to form and declare his own opinion. But the Boers are a people that cannot be driven. He must lead; and to lead them properly he must feel the pulse of their national life. How to do that with a people so broken and divided by the grim scourge of war?

More than half of the Boer men were now prisoners of war, and of the 10,000 Transvaalers still remaining in the field most of them were separated from their families, homeless wanderers on the veldt.

The old Boer Government, Kruger and his friends, were away "on leave" in Europe. Schalk Burger and Botha represented the acting Government; and there was no absolute compulsion to consult the absent delegates. But it was a great responsibility for Botha and Schalk Burger to act alone.

There were other and even greater difficulties. General Botha had to deal, not only with his own people, but with the resolute and formidable fighting bands of the Orange Free State. In that State the leading personalities, President Steyn and General De Wet, the Vice-President, were far less inclined to peace than the Transvaalers. It was one of the strangest facts in that great struggle that the men who came most reluctantly into the war were in the end most reluctant to make peace. The Orange Free State had at the beginning little desire for the conflict. They honoured the bond of their defensive alliance; but they would readily have seized upon any excuse to stay outside. But just as their civilisation was purer and less diluted than that of the modern Transvaal, so they clung to their independence more fiercely. Their freedom had not been restricted by any Convention: the loss of the diamond fields had saved them from much temptation. The "Orange Free" before the war was a famous model State; and they had not yet (in 1902) been brought to the point of weakness that easily accepts surrender. Only 6,000 men left in the field, and their country was widely devastated; but the survivors were stalwarts, and there was always the Cape Colony to raid. So it was that in these discussions their leaders still proved the most obstinate "Bitter-enders"—just as now, in the politics of to-day, they still resist most obstinately the mingling of their racial influence with that of the British stock.

If we try to look at the matter from the side of the Republics, we can see that there was real ground for an honest difference of opinion as to the best way of ending the war. Some thought that there was still a fighting military chance. Some still dreamed of European complications—not so impossible as others imagined.[1]

It was the strict view of the Republican leaders that if they should once accept terms as British subjects they would be morally pledged to their plighted word. If, on the other hand, they should persist in their refusal to make terms, and slide into an unconditional surrender, then, in their view, they would always reserve the right to rebel in the future. That was the great argument put forward by Steyn and De Wet, and it nearly carried the day. But there were grave considerations on the other side. There was the fate of the Cape rebels and of the prisoners of war, who would have neither military nor civil rights of any kind unless the Governments came to terms. Last,

[1] The Morocco trouble was just beginning to loom up.

but not least, there were still thousands of Republican women and children in the concentration camps and on the wrecked farms, towards whom the fighting men felt with an intensity of grief and passion possible only in a scattered pastoral people.

On April 9, 1902, the representatives of the two Republican Governments met at Klerksdorp in the Orange Free State. On the Transvaal side were Botha, Reitz, De la Rey, Lukas Meyer, and Krogh—for the Orange Free State Steyn, De Wet, Brebner, Hertzog, and Olivier. The meeting opened with prayer, after the excellent fashion of the ancient world, and the correspondence between the Governments of Great Britain and Holland was read. Botha and De la Rey gave their reports as to the condition of the country, and then President Steyn commenced to speak. Crippled and half blinded by his experiences in the war, this indomitable man still from his chair pleaded for independence. He said definitely that he would rather surrender unconditionally than make terms.

Thus the great issue was opened, and through the whole of that day the debate swung to and fro, grave, eager, and critical—a debate on which there hung the future fate of a people.

The evening closed without a decision. But already there was a slight leaning towards peace. For on the following day (April 10) Judge Hertzog opened the sitting by laying a definite proposal before the Conference. It was that Lord Kitchener's overtures should be accepted as a basis of negotiations and an interview asked for. This proposal was adopted, and the request for such an interview was telegraphed immediately to Pretoria. Then Hertzog proposed that the Republicans should frame proposals of their own to lay before Lord Kitchener at Pretoria as a starting point for the discussion. A sub-committee went apart and framed the proposals. These were accepted and fixed as a basis.

It is pathetic now to look back on those last proposals of the little Republican Conference at Klerksdorp. Not even yet did they abandon the last lingering hope of preserving their independence. There was to be a "Treaty of Friendship and Peace"—a Customs Union—a Union of Posts, Telegraphs, and Railways—a Common Franchise—demolition of forts—Arbitration—equal use of languages—a reciprocal amnesty. Excellent before the war but now too late, too late!

It is not to be supposed that Botha had the smallest belief that these terms would be acceptable to the British Government. But he agreed to them as a starting point for negotiations. It was absolutely necessary for him to carry his people with him. If he had refused to fall in with these proposals he would have been outvoted, and would have been left helpless and apart. The Boers had to be convinced that the British proposal was irrevocable. They had to be allowed to employ their engrained racial instinct for bargaining. Only so could there be any chance of peace.

Before the day closed, General Wilson came to the tent where the Boers were meeting, and brought Lord Kitchener's reply. He was willing to meet the representatives at Pretoria; and trains would be provided to take them thither.

The Boer representatives arrived at Pretoria on the evening of April 12. From the very moment of their arrival they were treated by the British Army with the utmost cordiality and hospitality. The Transvaal leaders were quartered in a house next door to Lord Kitchener, and the Free Staters were not far off. It became quite clear to the Boers that the British desired peace if they could obtain it on any terms honourable to themselves. But it was soon also brought home to them that their independence was gone beyond recall. The British officers mixed freely with them, and spoke constantly of the new Colonies as established facts. The Free State leaders refused to be drawn into talk; but the British officers persisted in their invincible cheerfulness, and the Free State chaplain reluctantly records that their stay at Pretoria left with them the most pleasant memories.[1] After breakfast on the following morning they went to meet Lord Kitchener at his house. They met in a big hall, and Lord Kitchener gave them a most amicable greeting.

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[1] See "Through Shot and Flame," p. 282, by Rev. J. D. Kestel. (Methuen and Co.)

Almost immediately he cleared the room of strangers, and proceeded to business.

The Republicans placed their proposal before Lord Kitchener. He replied that the British could entertain no proposals short of annexation. But there were many kinds of British Colonies—he ingeniously argued—and there could be no indignity in their accepting the looser kind of Colonial status. This great stroke of persuasiveness achieved its object. The Republicans began to be led into discussion, and those who begin to discuss are already on the road to agreement. Why then, they said—with some astuteness on their side—could not the British Government regard the Republican proposals—this Treaty of Friendship and Peace with its Customs Union—as equivalent to annexation? Ireland was brought into the controversy—on both sides—and Lord Kitchener claimed to be an Irishman himself. Then he asked them to drop their proposals and to argue on the British basis. But the Republicans pressed him very strongly to telegraph their proposals to the British Government. Lord Kitchener clearly did not want to break off the negotiations. At last he took a sheet of paper and began to draft the Republican proposal in a milder and more presentable form for home consumption. At the end of the telegram—with a touch of true diplomacy—he added a phrase, gently sounding the Home Government as to the possibility of a middle proposal, satisfactory both to Boers and

British. This vital phrase was accepted by the Republican delegates; and so, by the splendid patience and perseverance of Lord Kitchener, the flickering flame of peace was kept alive.

The answer of the British Government did not come for two days—until Monday, April 14. The delegates had just reached the limits of human patience when they were summoned to Lord Kitchener's house. The official reply had arrived; and Lord Milner had arrived also. The observant Free State chaplain noticed his piercing eyes, his pallor, his sleepless fear of a precipitate, emotional peace.

The Free State chaplain used his eyes well. For there had arisen at this moment a strange and surprising difference between the British statesman and the British soldier. Lord Kitchener was now anxious and even eager for peace. Ruthless in war—perhaps because so ruthless—he could translate the term "unconditional surrender" into all the horrors of an exterminated people. Lord Milner, milder in war, was less anxious for peace. His great anxiety was lest a passing phase of sentiment should give back to the Boers all that they had lost.

This strange clash of able minds and strong wills now began to make itself sub-consciously felt in all the details of this great discussion—especially on the question of the period which should elapse before the conquered Colonies should enjoy full responsible Government.

Lord Kitchener opened the new debate by reading the reply of the British Cabinet.

The British Government refused to accept the terms of the Boers. But they asked Lord Kitchener to encourage them to put forth fresh proposals excluding independence.

The great controversy was resumed. The Republican leaders urged that it was for the British to speak next. But both Lord Kitchener and Lord Milner refused to make any further proposals. Then President Steyn raised the point that the Republics could not give up their independence without consulting their own people. On this there arose a long and critical debate. Over and over again it seemed as if they had all reached a deadlock; but on every occasion of difference Lord Kitchener persisted with the same magnificent display of patience and resource. At last he agreed to telegraph home asking the British Government to state terms based on the acceptance of annexation, and suggesting that they should allow the Boer leaders to consult their people.

Again there was a long delay—two days. In London, too, a critical struggle was going on between those who were for parley and those who were for unconditional surrender. But there, too, the moderate party had won. The tone of the telegram sent in reply was far from friendly to the Boers; but the essential new fact was that the Government consented to allow the Republican leaders to consult the commandos. More important still, the British Government made the first definite step towards a compromise by agreeing that the Middelburg terms should be revived and made the basis for a new attempt at agreement. The Middelburg terms meant practically that once annexation was accepted every other concession might be granted.

The Republican leaders wished to modify these terms in one vital respect. They wished that a fixed date of three years should be named in the Treaty within which they should enjoy responsible Government. Lord Kitchener was willing to give way. Lord Milner strenuously opposed and carried Mr. Chamberlain with him. The date was left open. It is a curious comment on the vanity of human schemes and quarrels that, as a matter of fact, the new Colonies did actually secure responsible Government within four years[1]—or only one year later than they had themselves proposed.

The next step was easily arranged. A month was allowed to the Republicans to go to their people: meetings were to take place under terms of armistice, and the will of the people was to be ascertained. President Steyn, now entirely incapacitated by illness, remained behind in the British lines—implacable but powerless. All the rest of the Republican leaders dispersed far and wide to conduct the strangest kind of Referendum recorded in modern history.

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[1] In 1906.

The visits to the commandos soon revealed to the Republican leaders that they would themselves have to make the great decision. None of these commandos were in a position to give any really national verdict. It is difficult to visualise now the utter detachment of these fighting bodies from the outside world. They had to rely entirely for their news upon such English newspapers as they captured in the convoys and camps; and few of those were of recent date.[1]

This very absence of news produced a difficult and troublesome state of mind. For no modern man is inclined to be content with ignorance. Deprive him of news and he will supply its place; and the empty place is too often filled with all manner of folly. In this case, the many tongues of rumour were busy with the wildest fictions of European intervention. The will to fight was kept alive and active by the most extravagant legends of British invasion and defeat.

It was Botha's hard task to tell the Boers the simple truth. He told them without qualification that all hope of European intervention must be put aside. And once that conviction began to penetrate, the chances of peace improved. But it is clear that the commandos were not in a mood for the influences of reason. There was no general armistice, and these strange meetings were held actually in the intervals of fighting. Lord Kitchener did his best to help forward the work. Rail and telegraph were placed at the Republican service; all the meetings were held within the time-limit; and the Republican Delegates were elected before the fixed date for the final gathering at Vereeniging.

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[1] I remember asking the Republican Generals after the war whether they had really been encouraged in their resistance—as was commonly asserted in England at the time—by the arguments of the British Radical Press. They informed me that, as they obtained all their newspapers from the belongings of captured officers, their reading had been almost solely confined to the British Conservative Press, which certainly could not be accused of giving them encouragement.

But there were accidents—fortuitous attacks and skirmishes—which did not soothe feeling. The average man on these occasions is far more combative than his leaders. He is more subject to passion and the desire for revenge. The thoughts of peace are long thoughts, and most men prefer the briefer thoughts of strife. So on this occasion, as on so many others, the leaders got from their followers the answer which they wanted—the echo of their own feelings. De Wet found that all the commandos which he visited demanded independence. It was only those who deliberately pleaded for peace who obtained any other results. The Referendum became a General Election campaign; and the two groups of Republican leaders struggled like two rival parties to bring the commandos round to their point of view.

The worst course of all would have been that the leaders should have been guided by these random meetings. The voice of these commandos was not the voice of a people; it was the voice of an army in the field; and the voice of an army is the echo of its pride and valour. It is a proof of the real shrewdness of the Commandants that they refused to be tied by these mandates from the battlefields when they finally met at Vereeniging.

For the representatives elected by the commandos for the Conference were in nearly all cases the officers leading them in the field. Lord Kitchener, with the consideration and good sense which characterised his action throughout these proceedings, granted a complete armistice to every force which was thus deprived of its commandant. Thus the Conference which met at Vereeniging on May 13 was practically a meeting of the officers in the field; and for the moment the armistice was general.

It was a good omen that the two parties to this Conference should have chosen for their meeting-place this little town on the frontier of the Transvaal and the Orange State with the hopeful name of "Union" (Vereeniging). Lord Kitchener had done his utmost to make the Conference a success. He had spared no expense on the preparations, knowing that peace is cheap at a great price. A great marquee had been erected for the debates between two camps, one for each of the Republics. On the eastern side was a camp for the British officers in charge, who did their utmost to soften the labours of the Conference by courtesy and hospitality. It was Lord Kitchener's admirable and generous endeavour to surround the fighting Boers with a genial and homely atmosphere. For it may be said of peace, as Plato said of virtue, that no man can help loving her when he really sees her face.

It would be difficult to imagine any meeting more dramatic than that of these fighting men, still in their fighting clothes, gathered from all the fields of war, assembled after months of division and distraction—friends and brothers who had imagined one another dead; fellow-countrymen and comrades-in-arms who had lost sight of one another in the fog of war; men who had fought on blindly, alone but unconquered.

In this assembly, gathered in the great tented tabernacle prepared for them, there opened on the morning of May 15 a great and critical contention. It was a renewal on a larger stage of the argument which opened at Klerksdorp—between the peacemakers and the "Bitter-enders." The "Bitter-enders" opened with a great stroke of Parliamentary tactics. It was known that the majority of the commandos had decided against surrender. It was now the aim of the "Bitter-enders" to make this mandate prevail. Their method was to turn the representatives into delegates. It was at once maintained by the Free Staters that no man present could go beyond his instructions.

General Botha saw at once that such a course would render all discussion futile. He instantly appealed against it. Judge Hertzog, as law officer of the Conference, threw his decision on the side of a free vote, following the high line laid down by Burke in his famous Bristol speech.[1] Representatives of the people, he said, unconsciously echoing that great utterance, were not delegates—they could be bound by no instructions.

General Botha then opened the debate with a broad review of the whole situation in the field of war—the shortness of food—the state of the women—the fear of the blacks—the peril of Kitchener's new blockhouse policy. It was clear that Botha leaned towards peace.

Then came General De la Rey, at that moment flushed with his victories, and still inclined to war. "True," he said, "there is great scarcity of food in the Western Transvaal. But," he went on cheerfully enough, "precisely the same state of affairs existed there a year ago, and when the Burghers were at that time without food—well, he went and got it for them!"

De Wet followed with a fiery appeal for resistance to the death. His was the language of the Puritan faith at white heat. The speakers had dwelt on the stern facts. De Wet replied boldly: "This is a war of faith!" he cried. "I have nothing to do with facts! The only concern I have with facts is when I have to clear them out of the way!"

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[1] Speech at the conclusion of the Poll, Thursday, November 3, 1774.

Then came the long series of war reports from the various parts of that immense and scattered field of war. As they were read, there gradually grew up a picture of woe which blotted out the flaming beacons of the "Bitter-enders." Outside that Conference tent a thick white mist lay on that fateful morning, like a shroud over the veldt, and as the hours of that African autumn day crept forward, it seemed as if the gloom of that dank, damp, chilly cerement were creeping into the chamber of debate.

The Conference met again early next morning, and now they were brought closer to the real issue. Having delivered their souls on the general question, they had now insensibly drawn nearer to the vital issue of the situation as revealed by the reports—should they accept the Middelburg terms or not?

Once more the great debate swung to and fro.

Gradually the Conference began to crystallise into definite parties for and against the terms. On the one side were the majority of the Free Staters, still doggedly opposed to peace on terms. Their motto was, "Independence or still fight on!" On the other side were the great majority of the Transvaalers, who, as the Conference went on, gradually converted their own war minority to the peace point of view. The reports revealed a country on the verge of a famine. The last year of war, in spite of all their victories, had left them far worse off. Speakers told stories of men clothed in sacking, of women half-naked—of commandos attacked by blacks—of whole villages dying out. Brave men like Viljoen and de Clercq declared that it was impossible to go on. "Let us make no more widows and orphans!" cried one commandant. Out of the great agony of that meeting there came one last desperate bid for a remnant of independence. It was to surrender the goldfields—"that cancerous growth," as Botha now called them—the curse of their country.

General De la Rey knew instinctively that no such proposal would now meet that situation. Very reluctantly this great, large-hearted patriot now declared that he had been converted by the reports to become an advocate of peace. "Fight to the bitter end?" he asked—and then in one mournful, lingering phrase he struck to the heart of the situation: "But has the bitter end not come?"

The "Bitter-enders" would not bow to the challenge. Still they struggled desperately against the stream. Bad as things were—they agreed—still, they were no worse than they had been for a long time past. These men fell back on that language of the old world which is at once so thrilling and so perilous. They appealed to the faith of their fathers. "Have you no faith in God?" they said, searching the hearts of their listeners. The answer was given mournfully by an old Boer commandant: "We asked for God's answer to our prayer. He has answered us—His hand is stretched out against us."

Once more Botha stepped in with one of those soothing utterances which come as balm in Gilead at such moments of great anguish. No one could accuse him of shirking. No one could say that this great fighter knew the meaning of fear. No one could say that he had not suffered—he whose elder brother had been killed, whose younger brother was a prisoner, whose nephews and nieces lay fever-stricken in the camps. And yet, in his great valour, he had the highest courage of all—the courage to tell his people when they must yield. "What is the bitter end?" he asked slowly. "Is it to come when all of us are either banished or in our graves? When the nation has fought until it can never fight again?" And then, with a note of passion, "No other nation in the world would have fought as our nation has done! Shall such a nation perish? No! We must save it by our counsel!"

De Wet made one last passionate appeal. "Our graves?" he cried. "But are we to dig the grave of our independence? If so, what difference is there between that and digging our own graves?"

But the decision had already gone against the "Bitter-enders" on the main question. On the third day of the Conference (May 17) the Conference came to the point of empowering the two Republican Governments to negotiate peace on the basis of a surrender of absolute sovereignty. A Commission was now appointed to meet Lord Milner and Lord Kitchener. One last pathetic sketch of an imaginary Protectorate with their goldfields surrendered was even now mapped out and presented by Botha.

The inevitable followed. Lord Kitchener and Lord Milner rejected this last desperate attempt at escape from the logic of surrender.[1] It now remained for the Boers either to accept the terms or to renew the desolating war.

Faced with these alternatives, the Boers, with the excellent bargaining instinct of their race, showed that they knew when they were beaten. Their resistance instantly and suddenly collapsed.[2] The Treaty was drafted in its final form for submission to the Conference.[3]

On May 29 the Conference met for the last time to receive the report of the Commission. A deep gloom lay over this last assembly of a free people. Invincibly recalcitrant, the "Bitter-enders" put up one last indomitable fight. The motto of the old

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[1] Lord Milner told Botha that the British Government had already gone further in the direction of peace than public opinion would tolerate.

[2] There was one last Sub-Committee—one final wrangle over details—a sharp fight over the money grant which would enable the Republics to pay off their debts incurred during the war. Botha made a great point of this because he knew the people looked to him. Lord Kitchener won the British Government to the broader course of a generous grant of £3,000,000.

[3] At Botha's request an official Dutch translation was appended to the draft. See Appendix II. for the governing clause.

"Die Hards"—the stalwart Puritans of South African independence—was that of Napoleon's "Old Guard": "We die, but do not surrender." But the moderates were now stronger, and they steadily resisted the extremists. General De la Rey now definitely ranged himself with Botha in his fight for the salvage of the race, and De Wet was left alone, still fighting against fate like a dying tiger. His one cry was: "Fight on!" But the large sanity of Botha had begun to prevail.

All men with fine feeling will look with respect and awe on this last struggle of the spirit of the "chainless mind." They will honour both sides in this last controversy. In a famous poem[1] Tennyson has given us such a scene—the picture of Sir Richard Grenville at bay, crying—

"Sink me the ship, Master Gunner—sink her, split her in
twain!
Fall into the hands of God, not into the hands of Spain!"

But then came the voice of reason and humanity—

"And the gunner said 'Ay, ay,' but the seamen made reply:
'We have children, we have wives,
And the Lord hath spared our lives.
We will make the Spaniard promise, if we yield, to let us go;
We shall live to fight again and to strike another blow.'
And the lion there lay dying, and they yielded to the foe."

It was that spirit that Botha expressed in his last appeal to the wavering Conference. At the critical moment there came to his support a man who has since moved to the very front rank among the statesmen on a United South Africa—General Smuts. His speech rose to the finest point of prophetic oratory. "Perhaps it is God's will," he cried, "to lead our nation through defeat, through abasement, yea and through the valley of the shadow of death, to the glory of a nobler future, to the light of a brighter day." It was the right note.

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[1] "The Revenge."

So soothed, the "Bitter-enders" grew less bitter, and the Conference swung towards the sad necessity of submission. There was one last peril—that they might enter into their new position as a divided, distracted race, torn by dissension and mutual reproach. General Botha looked ahead into the future and made a supreme and generous effort to avert this disaster. Next morning he went with General De la Rey to visit De Wet, and the two men pleaded with their comrade in arms that they should not end this contention in division. General De Wet nobly agreed. He assembled his Free Staters that morning, and in one last solemn meeting he persuaded those iron men, the Commandants of the Orange State, to bow their wills. The chaplain has left us a picture of that scene —those strong men gazing in front of them, their eyes filled with unshed tears, De Wet pleading for the Treaty against his own conviction. Thus appealed to by their leaders, the Free Staters gave way, and on that afternoon of May 31, 1902, the Republican Conference voted to accept the British terms by 54 votes to 6.

The long war was at an end. That very evening, at five minutes past eleven o'clock, the Treaty of Vereeniging was signed at Pretoria by the joint representatives of the Boer and British Governments.

After signing, Lord Kitchener rose and held out his hand to General Botha. "We are good friends now," he said.

So, in that handclasp, the two men who had done most to restore peace to South Africa vowed their fealty to the solemn pact of Vereeniging.

CHAPTER VIII

SALVAGE (1903–6)

CHAPTER VIII

SALVAGE (1903–1905)

"To endure is a part of justice, and men do wrong involuntarily. Consider how many already, after mutual enmity, suspicion, hatred, and fighting, have been stretched dead, reduced to ashes, and lie quiet at last."—MARCUS AURELIUS.

IN August of 1902, the year of peace in South Africa, Botha came to London with De la Rey and De Wet. The Generals lodged off the Strand, and during the following six weeks frequent conversations enabled me to form a clear impression of their attitude and policy after the signing of the Treaty of Vereeniging.

They had come to London with a touch of that rather pathetic faith in the central power which brought citizens of Ancient Rome to Cæsar. In South Africa they were now a conquered people, and on the conquered falls woe. At the moment they had little honour in their own country, and small chance of genial audience in the court of the conqueror.

Since the signing of the peace, indeed, Botha's had been a busy and arduous life. There was at first the immense physical relief of cessation from war. On June 3, 1902, there was a gathering of the Boer leaders at Garden House, Pretoria. General Botha remarked that "it was the happiest day since he left school!"

On the morrow of Vereeniging Botha and his fellow-leaders had addressed an open letter to the citizens of the dead Republics. He made to them a solemn appeal now to work together for the social and spiritual betterment of the country. He urged loyal obedience to the new Government.

Then Botha turned immediately to the great tasks of restoring and salvaging this scattered and suffering people. He and his colleagues went, according to their pledge to the British Government, to inform the fragments of their broken nation—the commandos in the field, the prisoners of war in their camps, and the "concentrated" women and children—of the loss of their independence, and to advise surrender. The scenes were so heartrending when these people heard of the failure of all their efforts that many of the bravest men found that they could not endure this pilgrimage. De Wet refused to go on; Botha, deeply anxious to win the support of the people, spared himself nothing. The newspapers of the day gave vivid impressions of the bitter scenes in the camps.[1]

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[1] Here is the description in the *Natal Mercury* of the way in which the people in the Durban camp received the news from Botha's lips:—

"Old men, dull of hearing, held one hand open at the back of their ears, so that they might not miss a word, while in the other they grasped a strong stick to support their bent, feeble frames. From the low, broad-slouched crape-banded hats gazed eyes that slowly filled with tears, with tears that were allowed

At the prisoners' camps Botha found that the great difficulty was to make the old fighters take the oath of allegiance, even although it meant instant release. Many of them vowed that they would prefer to go to America or German South-West Africa.[1]

Realising on these journeys the utter exhaustion of the country, Botha put his pride in his pocket and went up to Pretoria to meet Lord Milner and plead the cause of his people. He even consented to sit at Milner's luncheon-table after his victorious entry into Pretoria, braving the inevitable misinterpretation of that bending to the foe. But Lord Milner took a strict view of the Treaty terms. He was in no mood to enter upon any general scheme of charity towards the Boer people.

It was then that it was decided among the Boer

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to fall unchecked to the ground, for neither hand could be spared to wipe them away. Among the thousands of women there was scarce one dry eye. Bravely did they try to force down sobs that would not be subdued, for they feared their weeping would drown the speaker's words. When towards the end of the solemn speech their leader prayed them to bury the past with all its strife and bloodshed and to live together in unity and harmony with the nations that were now their friends, hundreds of women gave way to unrestrained weeping. Hundreds of sobs choked them in endeavouring to stay the flood of feeling that was surging within their hearts and bosoms. One woman cried out through her sobs that he must not leave them, that he must come and speak to them in their huts, and the Boer leader sympathetically assured her he would come back on Monday. From a thousand throats came broken expressions of thanks."

[1] Subsequently a modified oath was agreed upon, but many slipped away.

leaders that Botha, De la Rey, and De Wet should go to England and Europe on an errand of appeal. They were to attempt to secure help from Mr. Chamberlain; but if they failed, they were to raise funds in Europe for their desolated countries.

Before departing for South Africa, Botha turned to look into the affairs of his own family. He visited Standerton and took steps to secure the property which was afterwards to become his home. Then he went to Durban to meet his brothers and sisters.

His family had felt the full shock of the war, and had been scattered fully as much as the simplest Boer family in the Republics.

When the war had entered upon its final phase at the end of 1901, Botha had been compelled to send his wife and three-year-old son John to Holland, where his youngest son Philip was born. His two daughters had been sent to a sister at Greytown, Natal, where there was a good school. But the mother yearned for her two girls so intensely that they were sent afterwards in charge of the friendly captain of a German liner direct to Rotterdam.

At Durban he met sisters who had gone through every form of war experience—one who, having been given ten minutes' notice to leave her farm before it was burned, had been permitted to live at Durban; another who, also ejected from a burning farm, had, after fearful experiences, been allowed to live with relations at Greytown; and a sister-in-law who, her children stricken down with enteric, had suffered an agonising experience in the Meer Bank Camp. Such are the realities of war.

This family reunion at Durban revealed fearful gaps. Botha's eldest brother, Philip, General De Wet's Vecht-General or principal Staff Officer, had been killed at the head of a forlorn hope—when he and three others had volunteered to draw the fire of a British regiment. Philip Botha saved his commando and paid the penalty of his life. Botha's brother, Christian, still lived and was present; but he was already stricken with the illness from which he afterwards died. Commandant Gerhardt Botha had found his unfortunate family in a concentration camp. Botha's youngest brother, Theunis, had been taken prisoner towards the close of the war, and had just returned from St. Helena. Four of the sisters joined the brothers. Of the younger generation, one of Botha's nephews had been killed; and his nephew Hermanus—now Brigadier-General "Manie" Botha, and one of the heroes of the German South-West campaign—was lying severely wounded.

It was a sad regathering. But already hope, like the first flower of spring, was rising from the ashes of the war. They had all suffered; but after all there was nothing here for tears. They had all done their duty through that fearful time. None had failed in the hour of trial.

Before leaving South Africa, Botha had to make his position clear in regard to a great political crisis which followed almost immediately on the signing of peace.

Lord Milner had moved up into the Transvaal and, as High Commissioner, was directing the affairs of South Africa from across the Vaal. The Orange Colony was a conquered Province; and Natal was always faithful to Lord Milner. His only trouble was with that very independent Colony, the Cape. Sir Gordon Sprigg was now Prime Minister of the Cape—since the fall of Mr. Schreiner—but though Sprigg held office he did not command the situation. The Cape Dutch, led by Mr. Merriman, were increasingly hostile. Lord Milner found that Sprigg was unable to carry through the scheme of South African Union which now filled his own mind. So Milner hit upon the idea of bringing South Africa to accept Union by suspending the Cape Constitution. In that design he was supported by Cecil Rhodes in the last months of his life. But the Cape would have none of this proposal. The scheme of South African Union was far too splendid to be reached along the road of suspended liberties. Even Sir Gordon Sprigg was opposed to Lord Milner's plan; and Mr. Chamberlain finally vetoed it on July 2.

In the course of this great controversy the "Suspensionists," with some effrontery, had quoted Botha as being in their favour.

It was while Botha was at Durban in July, 1902, on this visit to his family that he gave an unqualified denial to this most mischievous rumour. "It is absolutely false," he said; "I am in favour of any movement that makes for progress; but the suspension of the Cape Constitution in my opinion is nothing but retrogression, and on that ground I am opposed to it out and out."[1] It is as well to place on record Botha's vigorous and virile utterance on that great question.

On July 30, the Boer Generals sailed for England on the "Saxon," and arrived in London on August 16. They remained away from South Africa all through the European autumn.

Three months had now passed since the signing of the Treaty of Vereeniging. The Boer Generals never for one moment during those months went back from that great decision. They regarded it as fixed and irrevocable. In all the conversations of that period I remember no sentence that breathed a shadow or shade of disloyalty to their pledged word.

"Dutch in race but British in citizenship," was already Botha's formula: now linked in honourable partnership with the phrase of Sir Wilfrid Laurier and his French-Canadians, "British in citizenship, but in race French." For with all the steadiness of his allegiance to the Empire, Botha has always been absolutely true to his own race. The reason for the surrender—at Vereeniging—so he openly admitted—was that it was the only way to save the Boer people. Now, for the moment, his absorbing aim and object was to restore the people that he had saved. "*Antiqua conserves, desolata restaures*"—"keep what is old, restore what is desolated"—those noble words of the Coronation Service sum up the policy which was the governing motive of Botha's visit to England.

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[1] *Natal Mercury,* July 14, 1902. In an interview.

For the need was desperate. It must come, if possible, through England: if not, through the pity of the larger outside world. His appeal was to humanity —"Is it nothing to you all ye that pass by?"

The first step of the Boer Generals, then, after attending Lukas Meyer's funeral at Brussels and meeting Kruger at the Hague, was to knock at the barred portal of the Colonial Office. The atmosphere of England was still frosty to them. Such welcome as they received came as yet from few outside the ranks of the "Pro-Boers." Perhaps it was the very warmth of this welcome that irritated Mr. Chamberlain. For the attitude of that great man was chilly. He demanded a list of the subjects to be discussed before he would agree to an interview: when the list was delivered he knocked out most of the subjects on the ground that they had already been settled by the Treaty of Vereeniging. The Generals rather "slimly" submitted that their claims as Peace Delegates might, even if then rejected, be now raised again by them as subjects. Mr. Chamberlain adhered to his exclusions; and the Boer Generals were perforce compelled to submit.[1]

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[1] Cd. 1284.

The interview took place at the Colonial Office on September 5, 1902, and Lord Kitchener was present with Mr. Chamberlain.

Once they met face to face, Mr. Chamberlain, as so often happened with him, was courteous and placable. He conceded several points, and was open to argument on others. He spoke with excellent feeling of the new oblivion which was required as the anodyne for South Africa:—

> "The war is over. We each of us fought as well as we knew how during the war. Now there is peace. All we want is to recognise you as fellow-subjects with ourselves, working as we shall work for the prosperity of the liberty of South Africa."[1]

No words could have been better. But when General Botha opened the all-important question of relief for the widows and orphans, Mr. Chamberlain cut him short, and by elaborating the case of the Southern States after the American Civil War, he left on the Generals the impression that Great Britain would add nothing to the £3,000,000 to be devoted to repatriation and compensation for war-seizures.

Botha and his colleagues came away from the interview deeply disturbed in mind. The needs of the Transvaal could not wait. There was danger of famine unless generous relief came soon. General Botha estimated the number of farms burnt at 30,000, and the loss in property to the Boers at £70,000,000. Some 20,000 women and children—so the Generals calculated—had died in the camps, and many of the Boer families were decimated.

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[1] Cd. 1284, p. 23. This paper contains a full report of the interview.

Partly, then, with the object of a larger appeal, and partly just to fetch his wife and children, Botha crossed to Holland in September, and on the 25th of that month he and his colleagues issued that famous appeal to the civilised world that caused so much offence to Mr. Chamberlain.[1]

On behalf of the widows and orphans, who would obtain no relief from the Treaty funds, they opened—so they announced—a "General Boer Relief Fund." They proceeded to tour the Continent and to make speeches on its behalf.[2]

Mr. Chamberlain watched these proceedings with grave and growing disfavour; and on November 6 he wrote to them from Downing Street a long and reasoned protest. He disputed their facts, and complained of their haste to doubt the British Government. But, as often with Mr. Chamberlain, when he was protesting most, he was nearest to surrender. For now, both in the letter and in Parliament, he agreed to extend the charity of the Government to the Boer widows and orphans.

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[1] "Our dwellings, with the furniture, have been burned or destroyed, our orchards felled, all agricultural implements broken up, mills destroyed, every living animal driven off or killed—nothing, alas! was left to us. The land is a desert. Besides, the war has claimed many victims, and the land resounds with the weeping of helpless widows and orphans."

[2] They visited Paris and Berlin. But they raised only £100,000, and perhaps this result was an illuminating revelation to them of the value of Continental humanitarianism.

The Boer Generals instantly returned to London, where they attended the House of Commons and heard the speech in which Mr. Chamberlain foreshadowed this new act of generosity, and announced his intention to visit South Africa himself. For Mr. Chamberlain was always an impressionable man, and probably Botha had "builded better than he knew" in the recent interview. A softer mood had supervened.

In this case, the softer mood lasted. For when Botha replied to Mr. Chamberlain with a weighty and dignified statement of the case for his afflicted race, Mr. Chamberlain adopted a milder tone, and both correspondents finally joined in a hope that Mr. Chamberlain's visit would help towards the restoration of peace and prosperity to South Africa.[1]

It was during the period of this dramatic fight for the soul of a people that an interesting development occurred. Some of those November days in London were gloomy enough for the Boer Generals. There were moments when the future seemed irredeemably black—when there seemed no hope of help for their people—no glimmer of light on the horizon of the future. The attitude of the public was still sulky and unfriendly. It was on one of these dark days, when we were all sitting together at the little Horrex's Hotel, that a bright suggestion was made and adopted. It was that the Generals should leave cards at Buckingham Palace on King Edward VII.

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[1] Cd. 1329, pp. 8–9.

That most tactful and gracious of monarchs had already displayed towards them that large-hearted frankness of spirit which made him a worthy successor of English Kings. On August 17, immediately after their arrival in England, he had received the Generals on board the *Victoria and Albert*, off Cowes, and introduced them to Queen Alexandra. I still remember the joyful pride and relief with which Botha told us of this episode. "He treated us as equals," they cried. "He showed us over his yacht, and"—best of all for the Boers—"he introduced us to his lady!"

It was now clear to those who knew the ladder of etiquette that the Generals had the right to call at the Palace. In their simplicity they had never thought of it. But it was shrewdly urged now as a way to the heart of the English people—and perhaps of the Colonial Office.

So next day, accordingly, they rode in state and broadcloth down the Mall—in hired carriages and well-brushed top-hats. The thing was well staged. The visit was excellently reported in the Press. It was well received by the Londoners. The popular tide began to turn in their favour. The rest of their stay in London was more pleasant.

The King was pleased. He frankly admired the Boers, and sincerely desired their willing loyalty. I remember going with Lukas Meyer, just before he died, to visit the King's stables. The King, knowing the Boer passion for horses, had given the old man a cordial invitation. It was pleasant to witness the delight of the long-bearded Boer—so soon to fall into his tired death-sleep at Brussels—when he discovered that many of the King's favourite horses were named after Boer towns and Boer fighters.

The Generals returned to South Africa in December, just in time to join in the reception to Mr. Chamberlain, and to help draw up the address which was presented by Mr. Smuts at the Raadzaal in Pretoria on January 5, 1903. Into this address Botha and Smuts managed to place, with considerable Boer astuteness, the very demands—amnesty, language, and so forth—that had been excluded by Mr. Chamberlain from the topics of the London September interview. Mr. Chamberlain found that he had escaped from these subjects in London, only to run right into them at Pretoria.

Now that the issue was thus enlarged, nothing but good resulted. There followed one of those free and frank exchanges of view in which Mr. Chamberlain always delighted. The end of it was that he drove away amid hearty cheers from the Boers.

Mr. Chamberlain's visit certainly did something to help forward the restoration of South Africa. But Mr. Chamberlain went home. Lord Milner stayed on. It was he who really moulded the new Imperial Policy.

Lord Milner's theory of the reconstruction of South Africa was that it should be treated as a clean sheet of paper on which to draw the outlines of a new and better civilisation. He had never approved the devastation policy; but now he accepted it as giving him a supreme chance of substituting a better order for the old Boer civilisation. First he carried out the repatriation of the 200,000 exiles with great thoroughness. Then he laboured to build up all the machinery of an up-to-date modern State, with little regard for the prejudices and passions of the people he was trying to benefit. Scientific agriculture, higher-grade schools, linked railways, splendid public buildings—such were the gifts that he freely poured from his Imperial Pandora's box during the next few years. To carry out these objects he brought in from England and the Cape a steady stream of clever young Englishmen. "Milner's Kindergarten," sneered Merriman, the South African master of flouts and gibes; and the phrase stuck: but Lord Milner went steadily on.

A vital question now arose. The military rule was now being superseded under the Treaty of Vereeniging by Crown Colony Government.[1] Should Botha and his friends join the Legislative Council which Lord Milner was now establishing? Early in 1903 Lord Milner conveyed to Botha, De la Rey, and Smuts a cordial, private expression of his desire that they should do so. On February 6 they wrote to him a careful statement of their reasons for refusing.

Their main contention, as expressed in that letter, was that the responsibility for government still rested with the British. The Boer leaders did not wish to share it with them. They even argued that it would in their eyes be better if there were no Council at all until the time came for full responsible government. Lord Milner replied courteously, but he decided to go forward with his Council. But the tone on both sides was at that moment friendly, and the correspondence was cordial enough to be published by common consent.[1]

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[1] See the Treaty in Appendix II, Clause 7.

Botha steadily adhered to this position throughout the two following years. He definitely decided that he would take no part in the Government except as an elected and responsible ruler. When in 1905 Lord Selborne repeated Lord Milner's invitation, Botha gave the same reply. With his usual breadth of temperament, Botha was quite willing to be on friendly terms with the British Crown Government. He attended the Governor's social functions. But right through the period of Crown Colony government he steadily refused at any time to accept responsibility without power, or power without responsibility.

But meanwhile Botha was by no means idle. How, indeed, could any leading Boer be idle at that moment? When the peace came in May, 1902, it found a nation in ruins. Rarely, since the days of the Jewish captivity, has a people been so scattered to the winds as the Boers at the end of the South African War. Half the men were prisoners of war. A sixth were dead. The majority of the women and children were still in the camps. The land lay untilled and unsown. Lord Milner and Mr. Chamberlain, when they toured through the region of war, were both appalled at the desolation.[1] The first great business of the leaders of the people was to bring back the remnants of a scattered race, and to put them once more on their own countryside—to build up their houses again and to give them a fresh start in life. It was to this work that Botha now devoted himself—the work of restoration. With his cool common sense, he stood aloof from all dreams of expansion. The real need was more immediate—not to expand, but to build up afresh.

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[1] See the letters in Mr. Worsfold's book, Vol. II, pp. 225–8.

His own personal fortunes helped to bring this home to him. His splendid farm near Vryheid—the beautiful and well-beloved "Waterval"—had been destroyed. For the moment he had no real home. His fortunes were disordered, and he was doubtless touched by that deep exhaustion which comes to men after prolonged warfare. He went to live in a quiet boarding-house in Pretoria, and there he made himself accessible to all his people.

To Botha's house in Pretoria there came a steady stream of old soldiers, often legless or armless, for advice and help on their return to civil life—war-worn prisoners from far-off Ceylon and bleak St. Helena—ragged warriors from the veldt, men who returned to their homes without a coin in their pockets to find not a room or an outhouse beneath which to shelter.

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[1] See the passages in Lord Milner's diary quoted by Mr. Worsfold, *e.g.*, Vol. I, p. 68. Mr. Chamberlain went through the same experience.

Those who visited Botha in those days give a vivid picture of the daily scene—the crowd of Boer people on the "stoep"—the men talking and the women crying, all the destitute flotsam of the great war looking to him as their sole helper and protector. He never tired in the work. There was no limit to his generosity. He helped all he could to rebuild their shattered farms, supplementing the slow-footed aid of Government from the funds that he had collected in his travels through Europe. He assisted them to restock. He took their ragged receipts and war notes, and sent their claims to the Government. He employed destitute Boers rather than skilled masons in building the new farm which he was planning at Standerton; for he had definitely decided to leave Vryheid, which had now been annexed to Natal, and no longer drew his whole heart. At no time was he a truer leader of his people than at that dark and forlorn hour of their fortunes, when he was helping them painfully up from the valley of the shadow once more into the sunlight of life and hope.

When his wife returned from Holland they bought a house of their own in Pretoria. Like all the women of the Transvaal, Mrs. Botha was perhaps even more sad and sorry than her husband. She was very heart-sore, and wanted to think things over. But ever through those days she was patient, sweet, and unselfish

—unwearying in her effort to help her husband through this season of suffering and depression.

Before the war the Boers had been growing into a rich people. Their farms were growing into estates, and their farm-dwellings to country houses. For the moment the effect of the war had been to destroy practically the whole of their accumulated resources. Years after the war people who before 1899 had been living in well-fitted modern houses were just dragging on an existence in one or two rooms or even in mere outhouses—so much more difficult is it to build up than to destroy. But there was great vitality in the Boer race; and very gradually things began to get better. Lord Selborne found, when he arrived in South Africa in 1905, that a great proportion of the farms were already in process of rebuilding.

Lord Milner, meanwhile, was rapidly and eagerly building up his great fabric of new departments—his Land Board; his Board of Education; his Railway Board; his inter-Colonial authorities—a costly and elaborate equipment, valuable in many ways, but not, in Botha's view, rightly adjusted to the needs of a war-scourged country.

From all these activities, therefore, Botha stood grimly aloof, absorbed in the instant work of pity and help. So remote, indeed, did he stand from current politics than in 1905 his detachment nearly led to a serious misunderstanding.

During this year the mine-owners had persuaded the British Government to add to the immense racial confusions of South Africa—that kaleidoscope of human colours—by an extensive importation of yellow coolies from China. The blazing outbreak of elemental wrath which instantly greeted this move throughout the British Empire surprised and perplexed its authors. They had not, perhaps, grasped the sensitiveness of race-fears, especially when combined with the dread of a lower standard of living. Searching for some support somewhere, the Crown Colony Government tried to draw from Botha's silence the conclusion that he supported the Chinese Labour policy. Sir Arthur Lawley, the Governor of the Transvaal, even cabled home a statement, read in the House of Commons, that the Transvaal people were in favour of the Chinese policy.

This was too much for Botha and his friends. They drew up a strong letter, pointing out that the question had never been submitted to the Transvaal people; but that if they were any judges of Transvaal opinion, the "overwhelming majority are unalterably opposed." "It would be a fatal mistake," they wrote, to introduce this labour without popular consent: it would be "a public calamity of the first magnitude."

This letter was signed by all the chief Transvaal leaders, and was sent on by Botha to Lawley with a covering letter, asking that it should be cabled *in extenso* to Downing Street. Remembering certain lapses in messages cabled to England in earlier days, Botha added, "I enclose a blank cheque to cover the cost of the cable."[1] Here was a thoroughness characteristic of the man.

It was too late. The Chinese had begun to come. Later on it became Botha's first and most difficult task of achieved rule to send them home.

As the months wore on, Lord Milner's policy grew more and more unpopular in South Africa. As the months wore on, South Africa grew more and more dissatisfied with the Crown Colony Government. Whatever views they might hold as to Lord Milner's policy, all parties and both races—British as well as Boer—began to agree that the time had come for self-government. Above all, the Boer leaders were of opinion that the time had now come for the redemption of the pledge given under the Treaty of Vereeniging.

In that ingenious play, *The Mollusc*, the girl is striving to explain why she has quarrelled with her lover. At last she breaks in a passion of tears—"He will try to improve me." So it was with the Boers now toward Lord Milner. He travelled; he wrote reports; he laboured unceasingly. But South Africa could not forgive him for wanting to improve her. He had not enough sympathy with her faults to be able effectively to correct them.

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[1] Worsfold, pp. 235–7, Vol. II.

The thing that finally brought the Milner policy to an end was the expense of it. Lord Milner and his men worked on the simple theory that the war would bring a great "boom" in its train. But it is not the habit of wars to bring "booms." Instead, there descended on South Africa, during 1904 and 1905, a black cloud of depression, increased by the accidents of disease and bad seasons. It was this great depression which brought the crisis to a head. For the large imported Civil Service, designed for a prosperous community, became for the starved and impoverished country an expensive Giant's Robe, which bade fair to become a Shirt of Nessus.

The cry of extravagance is the one touch which makes all citizens kin. In this case it brought Briton and Boer together. The British residents of the Transvaal began to bury the hatchet of the war period. The fatal word went round that Milner's scorpions were worse than Kruger's whips.

The notion that a British Colony could not govern itself could not indeed, as a policy, long survive war conditions. Once South Africa realised that it was being adopted as a policy of peace, the whole population, both British and Boer, rose up against it.[1]

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[1] In a despatch to Lyttelton (May 2, 1904), Lord Milner bases his opposition to responsible government in the Transvaal on the incapacity, not of the Boers, but of the British population. "They are politically inexperienced and thoughtless to a degree."—(Worsfold, Vol. II, p. 264.)

It was in 1904 that Botha began first to take part in the agitation for self-government that was now spreading rapidly through the whole country. The first movement of awakened national feeling began with the protests of the Boer pastors against the neglect of their religion in the new English schools. One hundred and thirty Boer delegates assembled at Pretoria on May 23, 1904, and chose Botha as their Chairman. Then they laid their case before Sir Arthur Lawley, the Governor. His reply gave little satisfaction. The movement grew. On December 3, 1904, there took place another Conference at Brandfort, when the speakers were more daring in their utterances. On December 16 came the funeral of President Kruger at Pretoria—a solemn tribute, in which both Boer and Briton joined with a new and remarkable unity of feeling.

The Home Government began to feel the force of the uprising. They foresaw the electoral storm and tried to meet it half-way.[1] Early in 1905 came the news of the Lyttelton Constitution, conceding the gift of representative government. The despatches of Mr. Alfred Lyttelton and Lord Milner proposing this reform crossed one another on the seas between Great Britain and South Africa. Both had simultaneously discovered that the cause of Crown Colony Government was lost.[1]

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[1] See, on this, the remarkable correspondence between Lyttelton and Milner in Vol. II, pp. 262–3, of Mr. Worsfold's book. Lyttelton urges his Constitution as a way of "dishing the Whigs."

Botha and his friends were now resolved not to accept any compromise. In December, 1904, they laid before Lord Milner their objections to the Lyttelton proposaal. Lord Milner strenuously supported Lyttelton. But the proposed compromise of representative rule only quickened and vitalised the national movement.

Lord Milner had a case. The Vereeniging Treaty spoke of "Representative institutions leading up to self-government." The Lyttelton Constitution seemed to meet those conditions. A delay seemed permissible; it seemed prudent. But South Africa was in no mood for delay. The full grant seemed risky. South Africa was ready for the risk.

Early in 1905, two great Reform organisations were founded with the sole object of securing responsible government—"Het Volk," in the Transvaal; and "Orangie Unie" in the Orange Colony. Louis Botha became the leader of Het Volk—"The People"—and instantly threw himself into the work of organisation.

The ground was prepared. For the "Representative" compromise had few friends in South Africa. They had already tried it. Natal had long endured that system of government: the experience had left behind a very bad taste, even among the Natal English. Among the Dutch there was a rooted belief that the British Government did not propose to give full responsible government until they had built up a British majority. The absolute exclusion of the Orange Colony from the Lyttelton scheme confirmed this impression, and roused the Boers in that Colony to the point of fury.

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[1] In the Lyttelton Constitution there was to be a Legislative Assembly with 35 elected members, 6 to 9 officials, and, of course, a nominated Executive. In a telegram to Lyttelton in April, 1905, Milner argued that with proper management the Boers could be left in a minority.—(Worsfold, Vol. II, p. 270.)

A situation was now arising not unlike that of 1881. Boers were combining with Britons in one common resistance. Both claimed the grant of responsible government as a right under the Vereeniging Treaty; and it was difficult to deny them. Branches of the new party were formed in every part of the country. There was even a proposal afloat that the Boers should form a Chamber of their own after the Hungarian precedent.

It really looked for the moment as if Transvaal affairs were about to start again on the same old vicious circle. It seemed as if Africa, as well as Europe, were destined to have her Ireland. Botha was determined to prevent this by achieving victory for his policy. He repressed every sign of disorder. He avoided all extravagance of menace. But in the cause of responsible government he worked steadily forward, addressing meetings, sending forward resolutions, taking on himself the full burden of the movement.

Then, at the very nick of time, came a great windfall of fortune for South Africa.

Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman became Prime Minister in Great Britain (December, 1905). The first use that he made of his stupendous majority which he secured at the polls in January, 1906, was to give, unsolicited and uncompelled, both to the Transvaal and to the Orange Colony that great and saving boon of complete responsible self-government, which was, in the end, their Treaty right.

We can see to-day that this daring stroke of high policy saved South Africa for the Empire.

CHAPTER IX

THE TRANSVAAL PREMIERSHIP
(1906–10)

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THE TRANSVAAL PREMIERSHIP (1906-10)

"When States that are newly conquered have been accustomed to their liberty, and lived under their own laws, to keep them three ways may be observed:—the first is, utterly to ruin them; the second, to live personally among them; the third is, to permit them to enjoy their old privileges and laws, erecting a kind of Council of State."—MACHIAVELLI.

THE gift of responsible Government to the Transvaal in December, 1906, now brought General Botha back into full public life. For four years (1902–6) he had been living away from direct power and responsibility. At no time, indeed, during that period, had he forgotten or neglected his people. He was always working for them and thinking of them; but he had consistently and deliberately refused to accept responsibility without power. This trying interval had now come to an end. Botha's restraint had undoubtedly done much to shorten the period. But now prudence and self-control had brought their full reward. During the last two years he had already been accepted in the Transvaal as the leader of the new popular movement that led up to responsible rule. He was now clearly marked out as the one man to accept the full burden of that responsibility which he had done so much to win.

The first "responsible" General Election for the new Legislative Assembly under the Campbell-Bannerman Constitution in the Transvaal Colony took place on February 20, 1907. General Botha put up for Standerton and he had his own personal election to look after. He was fought very keenly by a young Englishman, the Hon. Hugh Wyndham, who had a large farm at Standerton; and it was necessary for Botha to hold many meetings to place his position clearly before his own people. But it was also his duty to act as guardian of the new cause throughout the Transvaal. There was no rest for him during this election. He had to defend the Boer to the Briton, and the Briton to the Boer. He had to justify to the old back-veldt Boer his acceptance of the new order: he had to prove to the Outlander the sincerity of his own loyalty to the Empire. He had to visit many constituencies in that vast stretch of country. He travelled in his motor from town to town and spoke practically every night. His was the task of the appeal of a British leader of party, to a smaller public, but over a larger space.

His triumph was complete. The Crown Colony Government had already outlived its welcome. The old Outlander party was divided. Botha stood for the magic cause of reconciliation between the races: and the public, now weary of strife, took up the cry for peace. He pleaded a truce to war memories; and by that great plea he won many British votes. The result of the election stood as follows :—

Botha's Party	37
Progressives	21
Nationalists	6
Labour	3
Independent	2

Thus Botha emerged with a clear majority—37 to 32—over all other parties combined; although by no possibility could they combine. He stood out in this election as clearly and obviously designated to be the elected ruler of a self-governing Transvaal.[1]

Thus it became Lord Selborne's duty to send for Botha as the first Prime Minister of the Transvaal; and for the next three years these two men worked together for the good of the country. Here began a very remarkable partnership. Lord Selborne had not hitherto displayed in British public life any decided sympathy for the Boers. He had already held high Cabinet rank in an Unionist Ministry. He was married to a daughter of the late Lord Salisbury—a lady of

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[1] In his own constituency of Standerton his general triumph was reflected :—

Louis Botha	1029
Hon. H. Wyndham	354
Majority ...	675

high social charm and distinction. Politically he was one of those public men who had gradually crossed from a mild Liberalism to a stout Conservatism by the golden bridge of Unionism. It would not have been surprising if with this record he had failed to sympathise with the feelings of the conquered Boers. But the stimulus of a new experience in a new country had, as not seldom happens, an awakening effect on the mind of this British Peer. There is, after all, a great deal in common between the Boer and the English country gentleman—in their joy in country sports, their suspicion of change, their habit of command. In this case a close and sympathetic tie grew up between the British Governor and the Boer Prime Minister. They grew to respect and admire one another during the years of this Transvaal Premiership, and each, within the limits of his own position, learned to work with a splendid persistence—"Too great for haste, too high for rivalry"—to advance the cause of South Africa.

In forming his Cabinet, Botha was able to give high position to a man who had already performed great services for the Afrikander cause—General Smuts. These two men present a striking and vivid contrast of genius. Botha's is a triumph of nature. His character—deep, broad, and strongly-knit—is not the product of any elaborate scheme of culture. He strikes those about him rather as a progressive farmer who had taken to politics—one of those old country types that presided so long over the destinies of England. But there is always innate in him a habit of going straight to the big things of life—a certain large breadth of vision, as of one looking on life from a hill top. With all this there stands combined a certain serene gift of moral balance, as of a mind pivoting on a fixed centre—a kind of splendid faculty for common sense. In all this he is a Boer at his best—the finest flower of that remarkable race—a Dutchman of the kind that look out of the canvases of Rembrandt and Franz Hals—one of those rare pieces of luck that have come to our Empire in aid of its task of bringing other races under our rule.

It is perhaps a quality of this high common sense that Botha has always had a great gift for judging men. Never did he display this better than in his choice as Colonial Secretary of that remarkable man, General Smuts, who, although he had lost his son in a concentration camp, now proved his acceptance of the covenant of reconciliation and oblivion by taking office under the British Crown. That was the first great triumph for Botha's spirit and policy.

General Smuts provided him with precisely that outfit of expert knowledge—in law, history, and State conventions—which is indispensable to a community that is to take its place among well-equipped modern societies.

Lord Gladstone, who has since had great experience of these two men, compares the partnership to that of

Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith when Gladstone himself was Chief Liberal Whip. Bannerman had some of that bigness of outlook which characterises Botha: Asquith provided the same expert equipment as Smuts. " Send for the sledge-hammer! " was what Bannerman used to say when he was hard pressed in the House; and all his Whips knew instantly that he meant Asquith. Smuts provides the same Parliamentary sledge-hammer power for Botha in South African Parliamentary life. For he comes to it highly trained in the Universities of Europe—Cambridge, Bonn, and Leyden—a man of the highest academic degree, with an intellect now sharpened by years of Parliamentary cut and thrust.

In choosing this lieutenant, Botha took a vital step towards helping to build up the Parliamentary supremacy which he has since attained.

In accepting the Premiership of the Transvaal, Botha stepped into his appointed and fated place. Both in battle and in peace he had proved himself the chosen man of his people; and the only true courage was for him to accept the leadership. It seemed easy for him to do so at that moment. There was as yet no discordant voice in the general harmony. When the Liberal Government of 1906 granted the Transvaal self-government, a great wave of emotion had swept over South Africa. This sudden gift of self-government, without threat or pressure, seemed almost too good to be true. The action of Campbell-Bannerman's Government for the moment disarmed race-hatred: it seemed to bear out all that the most sanguine Boers had said about the British Empire. The Afrikanders seemed to step from a nightmare of distrust into a fairyland where hopes came true and promises were fulfilled. Faith reigned supreme. For the moment the reconciliation between the peoples seemed complete. It is Lord Selborne's opinion that at no time during his Governorship were the two races so friendly as at this moment.

Some months later I happened to meet in London that excellent man, Mr. Sauer,[1] a Cape Minister who had come over for the Conference. He assured me that the gift of self-government to the new Colonies had worked a miracle in South Africa. "You have trusted them," he said, "and they will be true to you. Depend upon it if your Empire ever gets into trouble you will find that they are the most loyal of British citizens." It was one of those few prophecies that come true. When the stress came, the great generosity of this deed bore fruit a hundredfold.

"May the Lord help me to bear the responsibility," said Botha to a friend as he started out to be sworn in as Prime Minister in the same building and almost on the same spot as where in other days he had argued against Kruger's policy. This swearing-in of Ministers in public is in South Africa a very solemn occasion—a sort of religious service, held in the Parliament buildings, and in the full public eye. Only a shallow observer would scoff at such a ceremony. Botha was in no mood for scoffing. Here, as in other things, Botha was a Boer of the Boers, a descendant of that old Puritan stock that was not ashamed to say:—

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[1] Since deceased (in 1914).

> "All is, if I have grace to use it so,
> As ever in my great Task-Master's eye."

Scarcely had Botha assumed the position of Prime Minister, when he was called to London as Delegate in the Imperial Conference of 1907.

This visit to London was a very important event in Botha's career. It was indeed an act of genius on the part of the Imperial Government to ask him at all—an act which, if report speak true, came only after much travail of agonised officialdom. His visit brought General Botha into the company of the Premiers from the whole Empire; and doubtless it did a great deal to impress on his mind the true soldering forces of that great human combination into which he had been brought—freedom and self-government. The sovereign remedy of liberty, indeed, was already working on the woes of South Africa. The splendid and generous reception dealt out to Botha by King and people in 1907 no doubt left a deep mark upon Botha's very human temperament. He gave a generous return. In meeting after meeting he definitely and solemnly pledged to the British people the full adhesion of the Transvaal to the British Empire, and his own intention to work for the welfare of South Africa regardless of race differences.

In 1907, as on his previous visit of 1903, he was deeply impressed by the kindness and courtesy of King Edward VII. This touch of personal courtesy now accorded with the many-throated welcome of the people both in the streets of London and at many banquets and gatherings. It is not too much to say that Botha was the hero of that crowded hour.

Such triumphs are always the target for rancorous tongues; and it was not to be expected that Botha's popularity in England should pass unscathed at the hands of all his own old followers. That same type of Puritan stalwart that fretted Oliver Cromwell to an early grave was now lying in wait for Louis Botha when he landed, flushed with success, at Cape Town. It is difficult to know where the cause of quarrel came in. A crowd of English witnesses could testify that Botha, in those days, abated no jot of the claims of his own people. At the greatest City banquets, in the midst of the most heady acclamations, he was never ashamed of his origin or of his native tongue. "I count the Taal the queen of languages," he once said. In London he would keep great audiences waiting while he spoke his replies in that simple dialect, and waited while the interpreter, standing by, slowly translated his message. He was not one of those shepherds of Israel who feed themselves before the flock.

He had never forgotten "the limit of his narrower fate." He had refused golden honours for himself; but he had come back bringing gold for his people.[1]

But "be thou as chaste as ice and as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny." It had been a perilous thing for a new Prime Minister to leave his party and Parliament so long. As soon as Botha landed in South Africa he was assailed with reproaches. He was accused of accepting too much British hospitality. General de Wet began to write letters full of bitter criticism. The thing came to a head in Pretoria. An individual named Breytenbach, a back-veldt Boer, even blackmailed him with stale slanders of his share in the profits of the old Dynamite Concession. Botha faced the music. Major Fuge, the head of the Police, hid a detective in the adjoining room, and the man stated his terms of blackmail within the hearing of this witness. Just before the trial Breytenbach attempted to escape along the railway and was actually seen by General Botha, who was saying goodbye to his sister at the station. A message was sent along the line: the train was stopped: the blackmailer was arrested and brought to trial. With the trial and exposure there came a revulsion of opinion in favour of Botha. But the old Boer "Doppers" never quite forgave him the favours of the British public.

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[1] He had secured a new loan of £5,000,000 for the Transvaal on the same terms as the previous loan of £35,000,000.

The first publication of these charges had been timed to appear on the very day on which Mrs. Botha was to give a great reception at Pretoria on their return to South Africa. The General's friends feared that his Boer following might stay away; but thousands came. Botha could not get to the reception until after Parliament adjourned in the afternoon. Lord Selborne with admirable tact refused to enter the room until Botha himself had arrived. It was on this day that Botha for the first time had "God save the King" played at his house, and allowed the two flags—the Union Jack and the Vierkleur—to fly side by side in his garden. It was an act of the highest courage. He was entering upon a difficult and thorny path—that road of the peacemaker which is always strewn with stones. It is still noted in South Africa that when Botha travelled over in the ship to the Imperial Conference of 1907 he and his party sat thirteen at their ship dinner-table.

Another incident of his earlier Premiership fed the flames of disfavour. That was his presentation in the year of 1907 of the famous Cullinan[1] Diamond to Queen Alexandra. This splendid jewel, the largest diamond yet found on the world's surface, happened to be discovered in 1905 on the famous "Premier Mine." Its discovery was due to one of those accidents which are in themselves romances. A certain mine-overseer was climbing an open hill in the mine on a day of brilliant South African sunshine. Far up above him on the hill he saw the light refracted from an object which instantly drew his eager steps. The overseer climbed the steep hill, mounting an almost precipitous incline until he reached the flashing object. He found it far larger than he expected. He had nothing but a walking stick, and with that he had to prize out the big stone from which the light was sparkling. Then he called for help, and it was with some difficulty that the diamond and the man were brought down the hill. The stone had been sent in 1905 to be cut in Holland, where alone such diamonds can be prepared for use. It had taken two years to cut the stone into two large diamonds. Botha, now Prime Minister, presented them to the Queen; and those stones now adorn the Sceptre and the Crown of England. A fortune was made out of the chips alone.[1]

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[1] After Sir Thomas Cullinan, who originally purchased the ground on which the Premier Mine is situated, and is now head of the Premier Mine. The diamond weighed 3,025¾ cts.

Botha was vehemently attacked in South Africa for the extravagance of this present to the British Crown. The old Boers protested angrily. But there is a notable example to justify Botha's generosity. In politics, as well as in religion, the pot of spikenard need not always be given to the poor.

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[1] Under the law, 60 per cent. of diamonds found in the Transvaal was treasure-trove to the Government. All that Botha paid therefore was 40 per cent.

For the next three years Botha was Prime Minister of the Transvaal Colony. The ruling object of his policy during this period was to draw the British and Dutch races closer together. He had already in his mind a vision of unity and peaceful development which, he knew well, could only be turned into reality by prolonged and patient effort. In all the acts of his administration he endeavoured to hold the balance between the races.

The first and most vital task that he had to face on returning to South Africa from London in 1907 was the sending back of the Chinese labourers to China. The Imperial Government was insistent that this should be done immediately. It was one of the matters on which British public opinion had spoken most clearly in the General Election of 1906.

The new extension of Imperial credit made to South Africa through General Botha gave the Imperial Government a strong claim. It was only fair that if South Africa were to be benefited by the aid of the Mother-Country she should also bow to her view on a critical question. The mine-owners had proved unable to pay their promised contribution to the war.[1]

Yet Botha found himself faced with the defiance of this powerful interest. They threatened as a body to close down the mines if Botha carried out the wishes of the Imperial Government. But Botha had foreseen this; and in consultation with the home Ministry he had devised an ingenious way of meeting their hostility.

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[1] £30,000,000—promised to Mr. Chamberlain.

Opinion outside Johannesburg was against the mine-owners. The Chinese had on several occasions got loose from their compounds among the Boer farms, and had robbed and murdered. There were disclosures of secret societies among the Chinese which had frightened even the mine-owners themselves. But Johannesburg as a whole stood together; the white employees were frightened by the threat to close. The problem was to find a break in their ranks.

The rift was found in that remarkable man, Mr. (now Sir) J. B. Robinson. He was one of the wealthiest men in the Transvaal; but he had always taken an independent view. He had always been just to the Boers : now he was willing to help the Imperial Government to send back the Chinese. He was willing, if necessary, to become Minister of Mines. He would, if required, help the Government to run the mines themselves with native and white labour.

Faced with this threat, the mine-owners hesitated. If the Government once began to run the mines, where would it stop? How much of the profits would be left to the shareholders? Would the mines ever be returned to their owners?

Capital is not always so brave as it looks. Faced with loss of profit, its courage soon dwindles. This threat of Botha's was a very big stick; and it soon brought about the necessary results. The mine-owners capitulated: the Chinese were sent back, and Botha was stronger than ever in the saddle. He had fought and beaten the most powerful private interest in South Africa. For a long time it had been clear that unless South Africa mastered the mine-owners, the mine-owners would master South Africa. Now Botha had clearly shown that South Africa intended to rule over its own house.

Next in order of difficulty came the task of revising Milner's Civil Service—the "Kindergarten" which was disporting itself so expensively at Pretoria.

It was not fair to the Transvaal to leave the Government Departments so thoroughly overmanned. It was at his own risk that Lord Milner had imported so many officials from over-seas; and it was at their own risk that they had come to serve a Crown Colony which was known to have a precarious lease of life. Botha had a perfect right to make a clean sweep. But what is legal is not always convenient. Hertzog and Steyn in the Orange Colony, both men of less placable temper, immediately began to drive out Lord Milner's English immigrants at Bloemfontein, both from the public departments and from the Government schools. They filled the vacant places with Free Staters. The result was a feeling of triumph on the Dutch side and of injury and resentment on the British. Botha desired to avoid both. So in his work of revision he left the best English Civil Servants. He was obliged of course to do something to rectify the balance. It was his duty to his electorate that he should give to the Boers their just and proper share in the Government. He introduced many of his countrymen into the Service. But he sternly refused to encourage those family methods of helping friends and relations which so often grow up in small communities—and are not entirely unknown in great.

From the reform of the Civil Service Botha turned to the primal duty of state defence. Here Lord Milner had abolished the old system of Field Cornets and commandos and had introduced a large and costly body of armed constabulary, a force unsuitable for a self-governing country. Botha did not at once revive the old system of defence. He did not propose that the Boers should immediately have rifles served out, although the great war between the Germans and the natives of South-West Africa and the unrest in Natal might have justified such a course. He thought it wiser to muster slowly. It was by his especial desire, expressed at the Imperial Conference, that 30,000 Imperial troops were kept in South Africa at a time when the Home Government would gladly have spared themselves the expense. As a first step towards restoring the old order, he reinstated the Field Cornets for civil purposes.

The next great matter to draw his attention was agriculture. Botha himself has always been a progressive farmer, and he did not fully share the feeling of some of his supporters towards Lord Milner's agricultural reforms. The schemes for British Land Settlement had already proved an extravagant failure; and no one wished to continue them. Botha fully approved all those central arrangements for restoring the vitality of Boer agriculture—the model farms, the supply of stock and seed, and central laboratory work—which Kruger had begun and Lord Milner had carried on. While in England, Botha had kept a keen eye on stock, and he was now able to develop his ideas in the Department of Agriculture; for he combined that portfolio with the Premiership. He took another and even more important step. He selected a number of young Boers and sent them to Canada and America to learn new methods of farming. In this way he trained up a new group of young progressive farmers who soon began to introduce the ideas of the new world to the veldt. Then he developed the policy of settling on the land those landless "By-wooners" who had become the chief social problem of South Africa since the war.

From land Botha passed to the even thornier problem of the people's schools. Here he was quite aware that there was much room for improvement on the old Boer methods. He had had far too thorough an experience as a boy himself of the old tutors to believe that they were the last word in education. The work of organising schools in the districts of scattered farms was by no means easy, and the Crown Colony Government had not made schools more popular by a tendency to use them as a method of spreading the ideas and language of the conqueror. In the Transvaal as in England education raises many difficult questions of language and religion; for every South African expects religion in the schools. It is certainly not for Englishmen, who have fought over this question to the point of civil distraction, to make light of the difficulties in South Africa. Here again Lord Selborne was by his training and experience admirably fitted to understand the difficulties.

But, perhaps, after all, the greatest matter now working in the mind of General Botha and his colleagues was the tremendous idea of bringing about the Union of South Africa. During the election of 1907 General Botha had already placed this vital question prominently in his programme. Speaking at Standerton in January, 1907, some fourteen days before the election day, he had already at that time advocated a complete unification of the five Colonies. He had pointed out the extravagance and peril of the existing system of rule, and he had urged the peoples of South Africa to follow in the steps of the peoples of Australia and Canada. "The old Boers," he said, "were the pioneers of the Transvaal and as they were pioneers in that matter so they should be on the question of Federation."

It was to that great question that Botha, now in close consultation with Lord Selborne, began to direct his mind.

CHAPTER X

THE COMING OF UNION (1908–9)

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"Oh! my sons, see how strong are all united things! If you would only live bound together by love and friendship one for the other, no mortal power could hurt you!"—*The old man in Æsop's Fable of the Bundle of Sticks.*

During the last fifty years there have been three great steps in the building up of the British Empire. The first was the British North America Act of 1867, which united the Provinces of Canada under the central Dominion Parliament. The second was the Australian Act of 1900, which grouped together the States of Australia under a central Commonwealth authority. The third was the drawing together of the white Colonies of South Africa under the South Africa Act of 1909, which placed the four principal Colonies of South Africa under the Union Assembly.

While the Mother Country has not even yet fully achieved the resettlement of her own Constitution by process of combat, all these mighty daughters of hers have in the meantime settled their machinery of Government by process of harmony. If we thus extend our vision over the Empire it really would seem as if the genius for Constitutional change had passed from the Mother State to her children.

Who can doubt that much strife would have been avoided in South Africa if earlier generations had accepted the advice of those far-seeing statesmen, Sir George Grey and Lord Carnarvon? More than that, who could say that even in 1907 that great and bloody struggle of the South African War had finally brought peace? By presenting South Africa with two new British Colonies it had created a fabric of four sovereign Governments, four railway systems, four Customs Houses, and four legal systems, all British, but with no common tie except the timid and shadowy authority of a distant Imperial Parliament and Executive. Already, after a few months of experience, the new British Governor of the Transvaal had been turned into a strenuous advocate of Union. He found peaceful government impossible without it. There have been few more remarkable State papers in the history of the British Empire than that which Lord Selborne issued in July, 1907, in reply to the request of the Colonies for his judgment.[1]

There had been already some beginnings. Lord Milner had taken some important steps to bring the Colonies together; and that, indeed, seemed likely to prove the most valuable and abiding part of his work.

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[1] Cd. 3564. Price 1*s*. 3*d*.

The Inter-Colonial Conferences which he had called together in 1903 had resulted in a Customs Union which lasted for two years; and in the July of that same year he had created by Order in Council another joint body in an Inter-Colonial Council, which was enlarged in 1904 and established a joint control over the South African Railways. This body had probably saved those railways from bankruptcy; but it had not averted all the losses which still resulted from conflicting purposes. The Railway Amalgamation Conference which met in February, 1905, as a result of the Conference of Premiers in June, 1904, had proved the only barrier against the perpetual strife of divided systems.

But in July, 1905, the agreements of the Customs and Railways terminated and had to be renewed. When Lord Selborne, then Crown Colony Governor of the Transvaal, approached this matter he became seriously alarmed at the grave divergences which were revealed by the discussions between the Colonies. A look at the map of South Africa will remove any surprise. The frontiers of two internal Colonies were wholly cut off from the coast, and therefore all goods imported into the Transvaal and Orange Colony had to pass first through Natal and the Cape and were at the mercy of their railway rates. The only alternative route was through Delagoa Bay, and the permanent temptation of the Transvaal was to play off the Portuguese against the Southern Colonies. This had been a favourite device of President Kruger's in the days of the Republics; and in 1895 it had nearly produced a war between the Transvaal and Cape Colony.

What Lord Selborne discovered in 1905-6 to his surprise and alarm was that all the same elements of strife still existed in full force. Lord Milner had produced a temporary settlement by a careful balance between Customs and Railway rates—the inner Colonies granting lower Custom duties on the imports of their neighbours in return for lower Railway rates on their own goods. But the balance was very unsteady, and the bargaining was becoming more and more difficult. Portugal always stood ready to obtain profit from the quarrels of the Colonies. It was clear that if at any stage one or other of the Colonies became defiant or recalcitrant the peril of war might well recur once more. Lord Selborne realised this awful possibility; and he became an ardent advocate of Union.

General Botha went through precisely the same experience when later on (in 1907) he, too, as Prime Minister of the Transvaal, had to renew these agreements. His ardour for Union was sensibly increased. He saw the terrible possibility of the Transvaal and the Orange Colony having to choose between ruin and war. He had, fortunately, retained in his service the ablest of the Civil Servants brought to the country by Lord Milner; and those young men were now passionately on his side. Men like Mr. Patrick Duncan had become leaders of opinion, and were founding Societies in favour of Union all over the country. These men did admirable spade work in persuading the English section to co-operate with the Dutch, and undoubtedly gave valuable aid to the movement. But in the end the issue rested with the elected Ministers of the four Colonies.

All the difficulties of the Transvaal worked towards Union; and the terrible memories gave an urgent impulse to the whole movement.

The really notable fact, indeed, about the uniting of South Africa was the speed with which the policy now passed from the region of ideas into actual achievement. In this work of acceleration General Botha played throughout a great part. From the very beginning he threw himself strongly into the movement, and with characteristic largeness of mind thrust behind him all party jealousy and race prejudice. His passion for unity was the natural result of his passion for peace. For his genius as a soldier has never caused him to fall in love with war. He has none of the Napoleonic passion for the battlefield. His nature contains no taint of what is known in the jargon of the day as "militarism." He never dwells with any delight upon his memories of war. When he refers to the great South African War, it is in terms of pain. "It was a terrible time," he is accustomed to say, "and I hope never to go through such a time again." This horror of war runs through all his work and fills his vision.

Like Alexander Hamilton with the American Colonies after the War of Independence, he now ensued union because he saw clearly that it was the only alternative to a renewal of war.

There Botha, like so many other leading men in South Africa, showed his real mastery over realities. Perhaps it was their recent experience of war that freed the minds of these men from illusions. It is too often the effect of a long period of peace that men come to regard war as a rare, deliberate crime of a particular statesman or Government, conceived in conscious and diabolical villainy. They forget that the real marvel of modern life is not war, but peace; that such peace as we enjoy from time to time is a coral island, beautiful but fragile and precarious, emerging from an ocean of strife, and always tending to a new submergence. Thus they are always astonished afresh when courtesy turns to slaughter.

But Botha and his fellow statesmen had been recent pupils in a sterner school. They knew that the causes of war are as often accidents and incidents as deliberate policies. They had been made to realise the quarrelsomeness of the natural man; they knew that wars, like revolutions, can be lit by matches as well as by torches. Such matches were lying about freely in the questions of customs and railways at that time dividing South Africa.

Once statesmen realise such possibilities it becomes useless to "prate of the blessings of peace." The only remedy is to remove the causes of war. Such, to their infinite credit, was the policy of the leading men of South Africa at that critical moment.

Events now (in 1907) began to move swiftly.

In Cape Colony a general election swept away Dr. Jameson's party and installed Mr. Merriman as Prime Minister. In Natal a change of Government brought Mr. (now Sir) Frederick Moor to the Premiership, in spite of his well-known sympathies with the Natal Dutch party. The Free State election had placed Mr. Fischer and General Hertzog at the head of affairs. Thus little remained anywhere of the old war parties. Peace Cabinets ruled South Africa.

It was the heads of these Cabinets that Botha invited to his house at Pretoria in September, 1907, and drew together in a common league and purpose for the peaceful unification of the divided Colonies. These men now saw that although the war had settled the race question, it had left the economic problems unsolved.

There was no time to lose.

In May, 1908, an event occurred which immensely increased the peril of the situation. For the very thing happened which Lord Selborne had always feared. The Railway and Customs Conference called together at Pretoria failed to come to an agreement. So deep were the divisions of the delegates and so strong the pressure of local interests that not even the prospect of possible disaster to the peace of South Africa could bring them to renew their understanding. It was clear that the South African Colonies would, unless they now unified, drift further and further apart. It was useless to talk to the delegates about the interests of South Africa as a whole as long as those delegates were the instructed servants of distinct and divided Colonies. It was futile, for instance, to tell the Colonies on the coast that their interests were the same as those inland. For as long as they were competing for trade and railway profits, that statement was simply not the fact. There was only one possible remedy for the "present discontents" of South Africa—and that was to merge the local interests in a larger Union. The only cure was to bind together these parochial loyalties in the greater patriotism of South Africa as a whole.

Fortunately, the members of the Railways and Customs Conference showed at this moment a rare and remarkable public instinct for the right move. So deeply were they impressed by the calamitous possibilities of their failure to agree on railways and customs that they passed two strong resolutions—one in favour of South African Union and the other in favour of a Convention to bring it into being. They renewed for one year the Railway and Customs agreements already in existence, and sent the resolution in favour of union to the Colonial Parliaments. Those Parliaments promptly responded. Each one severally adopted the Resolution, and delegates were appointed. The number of the delegates was fixed in proportion to population—12 for Cape Colony, 8 for the Transvaal, 5 from Natal and the Orange River Colony, and 3 from Rhodesia.

Among these delegates the Cape sent Mr. Merriman and Sir Starr Jameson; the Transvaal General Botha and General Smuts; and the Orange River Colony sent General Hertzog, "President" Steyn, and General de Wet. Lord Selborne would undoubtedly have been placed in the chair if it had not been deeply felt that this must be a Convention of South Africans and South Africans alone. Lord De Villiers, the distinguished Chief Justice of the Cape, was appointed President, after he had visited Canada to consult statesmen there concerning the working of the Dominion Act. A Vice-Presidency was created for Mr. Steyn as an honourable tribute to his valorous defiance of adversity and ill-health. He played a prominent and valuable part.

The Convention assembled on October 12, 1908, at Durban—a graceful and tactful recognition of the importance of Natal to the great cause of Union. Four armoured cruisers were sent to Durban by the Imperial Government as a tribute of respect to this great historic gathering. During the course of the Conferences that followed, the Convention shifted first from Durban to Bloemfontein, and then from Bloemfontein to Cape Town. Thus different parts of South

Africa were allotted some share in giving hospitality to these famous Councils.

One of the first resolutions passed at this Convention was that the debates should be secret. It was held in South Africa—as afterwards at the London Conference—that the statesmen concerned would speak more freely if they were not subjected to a running fire of comments from outside. In such discussions proposals are made which can only be rightly viewed as parts of a large scheme of agreement. But it is inevitable that, viewed alone, such concessions must cause grave offence to the party man, with his inevitable attachment to those principles which represent one side of the full moon of truth. Such offence actually arose in England at the close of 1910, at the crisis of our own constitutional conference, with fatal results to the success of that effort.

These great debates have now passed into history; and history has a lawful claim to the secrets of the past. A very convincing summary of the speeches has been published to the world by one of the Cape members and witnessed by one of the secretaries to the Convention.[1]

The record that thus leaps to light brings nothing but credit and honour to the public men of South

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[1] "The Inner History of the National Convention of South Africa," by the Hon. Sir Edgar H. Walton. (T. Maskew Millar: Capetown and Pretoria. Longmans, Green and Co.: London, New York, Bombay. 1912.)

Africa. Nothing could be finer than the spirit of grave patriotism in which these fathers of the Union debated the issues of their country. There were on many points sincere difficulties of principle honourable to both sides in the controversy. It was inevitable that in an assembly drawn from Colonies so widely divided in space and so differing in race and history there should be serious variations in outlook. In such cases there was no attempt to shirk the issue. There were clear and bold statements of view on either side; there were always reasonable attempts at compromise. But if compromise proved impossible it was then recognised that the will of the majority must prevail. The Convention went to a vote, and the minority gave way to the majority. That is still, in the last result, when all attempt at compromise fails, the only known way of peace in arriving at political decisions.

Perhaps the most acute of all the conflicts that arose in this Convention centred round the questions of language and colour. On these points a settlement was only reached after searching conflicts of heart. But what was really a far more vital, though less inflamed, conflict arose over the whole question of the structure of the Union. The debate became an issue between Federation and Union. It was conducted on a very high level. The notable fact is that after careful comparative study of all the Federal Constitutions in the world the statesmen of South Africa definitely decided in favour of Union as against Federation. It is on those lines that a settlement was finally framed by an unanimous Convention. It is not the least remarkable part of these great proceedings that four sovereign Parliaments voluntarily handed over their sovereignties to one common authority and consented to take the lower room of mere provincial Councils.

In all these great arguments Botha played a conspicuous part. He spoke always in Dutch, and his speeches were interpreted to the Convention by his capable and devoted secretary, Dr. Bok. Botha supported Unification against Federalism. He spoke up for the rights of the "Taal"; and he took a strong and uncompromising stand on the question of giving the franchise to the coloured races. He and his colleagues from the new Colonies said definitely that if the Cape franchise were to be extended to the more backward natives of the northern Colonies all chances of Union would be at an end. The Transvaal and the Orange Colony, therefore, simply could not agree to that extension. Here Botha found himself divided from some of his best friends at the Cape—especially Mr. Sauer, who became the eloquent and inspired champion of the native franchise. But Natal, where a million Zulus live side by side with 100,000 whites, came to the support of the Transvaal; and the result was a compromise which left the question of franchise in the various Colonies as it existed before the Union.

Thus the Cape native franchise remains in force, but is not extended to the north.

There were crises inevitably severe in the proceedings of the Convention before the whole structure of Union was firmly established. There was the difficulty of the choice of Capital. Each of the most important South African Capitals—Cape Town, Pretoria, and Bloemfontein—put in their claim to be the Capital of South Africa. Such rivalries of place arouse the keenest feelings, and there was no absence of stress in this discussion. Committee after committee was appointed and reported their failure to agree. The Premiers met and parted without yielding to one another. The President proposed a decision from outside. No one cared for that. It was only at the last moment that a decision emerged from the very hopelessness of a definite and single choice.

For it had gradually become clear that the issue lay between Pretoria and Cape Town. But it was also clear that if either were chosen exclusively as the sole Capital of South Africa the neglected Colony might be lost to the cause of Union. So desperate did the tension become that Bloemfontein seemed likely to come in as the "rejoicing third," and even Pietermaritzburg began to lift up its head. Then, at the last, with a sudden flash of common sense, the Convention recognised that honours must be divided—that neither Cape Town nor Pretoria had the overwhelming claim—and that both had the right to some share of the glory. So the Athanasian paradox emerged that South Africa was to have no Capital at all, or, if any Capital at all, three Capitals. Cape Town was to be the meeting place of the Assembly; Pretoria the centre of Administration; and Bloemfontein the seat of Justice. So it was decided and enacted. There were grave inconveniences in such a settlement, especially in the separation by a thousand miles of the Parliament from the departments. But with good will almost any arrangement can be made to work. It is, indeed, probable that most States—including, perhaps, Great Britain—suffer from an over-centralisation of energy. At the present moment in South Africa the members of the Cabinet spend half the year in Cape Town, and the other half in Pretoria; and thus the varied interests of that immense country have all a chance of reaching the ear of the Government.

The tendency to a settlement in these disputed issues was greatly aided by one very remarkable and happy result from the meetings of the Convention. General Botha and Sir Starr Jameson had met at the Imperial Conference of 1907, and had there become friends for the first time. In the ten years before that Conference each had played a great part in the moving drama of South Africa. It was Jameson who, far back in the year 1896, had reopened the historic strife between Boer and Britain by that strange act of impatience and violence, the "Jameson Raid." When in due course the dragons' teeth sown at that moment produced their iron harvest of armed men, Botha had taken a leading part alike in the war and the peace that followed. Meanwhile, Jameson had in the course of time succeeded Rhodes as leader of the Progressive Party at the Cape, become Prime Minister of the Cape Colony for three years (1904–1907), and finally been thrown from power by the party of the Bond, which had first employed the Senate to paralyse his finance, and then defeated him at the polls.

Thus Jameson did not come to the Convention as Prime Minister. Merriman had taken his place. But Jameson was still regarded as the hope of the British Loyalists, and he was expected to maintain their cause. In such a Convention Jameson represented the British cause as much as Botha represented the cause of the Dutch.

These two men, then, might, if they had been small men, have prolonged the agony of a divided South Africa. But they were both of them men of large, forgiving temperament. Jameson has been always, at all times, one of those men who are natural hero-worshippers. Not a man of great original genius himself, he possesses a certain rare, innate capacity for recognising greatness when he sees it. It is with him a kind of unreasoning idealism.

What happened now was that Botha took the place of Rhodes in this hero-worshipper's niche of heroes. Jameson believed that Botha was honest. He believed that he was pursuing the good of South Africa. At the same moment, Merriman drifted away from Botha; for often, on many points, the interests of the Transvaal and the Cape clashed. So it was, by one of the strangest ironies in history, that Jameson and Botha worked together at the Convention on common lines for the future of South Africa.

It was not an alliance that was likely to be popular with extremists on either side. There were Boers from the back veldt who had never quite forgiven Botha for shaking hands with Jameson at the Imperial Conference of 1907; and there were British extremists who could never quite tolerate that Jameson should have any dealings with Botha. One of these thought at least that he had an argument which would prevail with Jameson. "Are you aware," he said to Jameson one day, "that Botha was one of those men who wanted to shoot you at Pretoria, after the Raid?" Jameson smiled. "Ah!" he said, "Botha was always right!" and the good Loyalist turned away dismayed.

At last the proceedings of the Convention drew to a close, and the draft Constitution was made public on February 9, 1909. But it was not yet through all its troubles. The draft was referred first of all to the various Colonial Parliaments. At this point the Opposition came from the Cape Dutch. That old political leader, Hofmeyr, the founder of the Afrikander Bond, managed to secure the passage through the Cape Parliament of an amendment which entirely upset the compromise over the distribution of seats. The draft Act contained a complex arrangement constructed of three-membered constituencies and proportional representation. When the Convention assembled again in Bloemfontein it was discovered that the Cape proposed to destroy the fine balance of representation on behalf of the country as against the towns. It was here that Botha and Jameson joined together to save the situation. Proportional representation for the Assembly was very sensibly abandoned and one-membered constituencies were substituted for three-membered. But the principle of one vote one value was strictly maintained, and with these alterations the draft Act was signed, and the Convention dissolved on May 11, 1909.

One difficulty remained, and that was the opposition of a party of zealots in Natal. It had been understood from the very first that Natal, in return for her consent to join the Convention, should be allowed a Referendum before the Union Act was passed into law. The Referendum now took place in June, and the supporters of South African harmony proved to be in an immense majority—11,121 for the draft Union Act and 3,701 against it—making a majority for the Union of 7,420. There was a separate majority for Union in every constituency throughout Natal.

The next step was to send to England a Delegation carrying the draft Act for submission to the Imperial Parliament. Botha was a member of that deputation, and, while receiving from all sections of the British public a welcome worthy of the great triumph of his ideas, he helped to lay the South African case before the Imperial Government. The Union Bill was debated in the British House of Commons and House of Lords on the basis of the good common-sense assumption that on the whole it is best to leave a Dominion to settle its own constitution. This instinct, which has carried the British Empire through so many of its crises unscathed, happily prevented the men at Westminster from putting their fingers very far into any of the complex machinery of the South Africa Act. The only question which raised feeling in the Imperial Parliament was the Native Franchise compromise. The refusal to extend the franchise to any natives outside the Cape was vehemently attacked and deplored, but in the end the British Parliament passed the Act with scarcely any amendment of substance.

The South Africa Act received the Royal assent on December 20, and May 31, 1910, was fixed as the date for the establishment of the Union.

Thus after stupendous efforts that did credit to all concerned the Union of South Africa was accomplished. Well may Britons be proud of those great sons who brought so nobly to accomplishment one of the most difficult tasks that ever fell to the lot of statesmen.

CHAPTER XI

THE UNION PREMIERSHIP (1910)

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"Who makes by force his merit known
And lives to clutch the golden keys,
To mould a mighty state's decrees,
And shape the whisper of the throne."
—TENNYSON.

LORD GLADSTONE, the distinguished younger son of England's greatest nineteenth-century statesman,[1] was chosen by the Liberal Government as the first Governor of the Union of South Africa. He left England early in 1910, with an absolutely free hand as to the choice of the first Prime Minister of the Union. The new order was to open on May 31, and all the Governments of the four Colonies were to come to an end on that day. The first South African elections, however, were not to take place until the following September. Thus there fell on the new Governor the heavy responsibility of selecting a Prime Minister without the previous guidance of a General Election.

The new Government had to be formed immediately after Lord Gladstone arrived in Cape Town (May 17). For there were many important legal and constitutional matters which would have to be settled by the new Government before May 31.

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[1] Member of the House of Commons from 1880 to 1909 for Leeds W.; known as Herbert Gladstone; Chief Whip to Liberals, 1899-1906; Home Sec., 1905-1910.

After careful consultation and reflection, Lord Gladstone called upon Botha to form the first South African Ministry. Botha accepted; and thus in May, 1910, he ceased to be Premier of the Transvaal and became Premier of South Africa.

Earlier in this month of May, 1910—before Lord Gladstone had landed—a great contention had arisen about the coming Ministry. Should the first Ministry be formed out of one party alone or out of all parties? A wave of sentiment had passed over some sections of South African opinion; and for a moment there had been a cry for a "Best Man" Government, selected from all parties. We all know these moments in politics, when all politicians combine to denounce the discords in which they have been nurtured. Angelic pauses—when men indulge opiate dreams, forgetting that difference and discussion are the very salt and oil of progress. Differences may be just as fair and honourable as agreements. Civil argument is often the only substitute for civil war; and a pretended harmony may be only the prelude to a worse state of discord.

In this case, the dream soon dissolved. Botha himself is always a placable man; and for a brief moment he was fascinated by this vision of peace. There were "conversations" between him and Jameson. But on both sides their followers took their principles too seriously to allow matters to go far. The issue fined itself down to the practical question of "under which King?" There were only ten places allowed in the Cabinet by the new Constitution—lean fare, as we all know, for a Coalition. Neither side could fit in its essential men. There was the desperate difficulty of agreeing as to the Premiership. There were the claims of—well, we all know the claims that press or count on these occasions—the woe and grief of the real party man—the anger of the plain man who has taken his political quarrels seriously. If England does not love Coalitions, certainly South Africa loves them even less.

Botha had to recognise that the thing was impossible. He was faced with the revolt of his own following. Merriman and Sauer at the Cape had just won a dearly-bought political triumph; and they could not be expected to throw away all their gains. They could not so easily lay aside their view as to Jameson's part in the calamity and suffering that had befallen their country. The Free Staters felt likewise; for politics to these simple men were grim realities. The Transvaal Boers stood alone, strangely enough, for a larger harmony. They had had enough strife; and Johannesburg always acted as a meeting-place of both parties.

Botha was forced to abandon the halcyon plan of this early May. Finding it impossible, he acted with instant decision and directness. He went himself straight to Jameson at Groote Schuur and told him plainly that the combination of which they had dreamed had broken down. He could not fulfil the expectations which had been discussed. Jameson generously accepted the statement.

Thus Botha was compelled to draw his first Cabinet from the ranks of his own friends. He had now combined all the forward political organisations of the old Colonies into one big group—the South African Party; and this large combination enabled him to throw his net very wide. His great desire was to secure Mr. Merriman, the Premier of the Cape up to May 31, as Minister of Finance. He left no stone unturned to secure this. But unhappily—perhaps a little aggrieved by the Imperial preference shown to the Transvaal over the Cape—Mr. Merriman found himself unable to accept office in Botha's Government. Botha managed, however, to draw the Cape into the Ministry by making Merriman's old friend, Mr. Sauer, Minister of Railways. He gave the Treasurership to his old Transvaal Treasurer, Mr. Hull. General Smuts became Minister of the Interior; General Hertzog became Minister of Justice; and the veteran Mr. Abraham Fischer, up to May 31 Prime Minister of the Orange Colony—now under the South Africa Act renamed the Orange Free State Province—became Minister of Land. Natal was represented at first by Moor, and after his defeat by Mr. Leuchars. Botha himself combined the portfolio of Agriculture with the Premiership. Thus he succeeded in constructing an Union Cabinet on the whole thoroughly representative of the different white races and opinions of South Africa. By comprising men who had been in arms against one another less than ten years before,[1] the new Ministry became a sign and symbol of the new fraternity of the new South Africa.

Having formed his Ministry, Botha's first duty was now to get a majority for it at the General Election of September, 1910. During the following months he was busy speech-making and electioneering. On June 14 he issued a manifesto to the country and followed it up with many speeches in various parts of the country. The main and persistent tenor of his appeal was that now they should all—Dutch and British—join together to pull South Africa straight. They must do away with the curse of racialism. They must form a new South African nation. It was not altogether an easy appeal to stand for. He was exposed to attacks on both sides. There were the British who had not laid aside the bitterness of war. There were the Boers who could not forgive Botha for his friendship with the author of the Jameson Raid. Jameson himself did not make the troubled waters smoother by a particularly daring and unrepentant defence of the Raid, which he now represented as an attempt to unite the Dutch and British races! This was too much for Botha, who had to disavow Jameson and all his works.

It was one of those fences at which the best political horses spill; and Botha now sustained the most disastrous political accident of his career. He had a perfectly safe seat at Standerton; and the circumstances of such a new start would appear to most observers far too grave for adding new risks. But he was persuaded by his party Whips to stand against Sir Percy Fitzpatrick in East Pretoria, an act not altogether harmonious with the new sentiment of union which Botha himself had favoured. It was a thrilling and Homeric contest between two South African giants, conducted with infinite personal good humour, but inevitably awakening afresh many memories of strifes better forgotten. East Pretoria was a peculiarly difficult seat for Botha to fight at that moment. Government servants had the preponderating vote, and a Prime Minister was likely to draw all the fire. He was beaten;[1] and two other Ministers fell also—Mr. Hull, defeated by Sir George Farrar on the Rand; and Mr. (now Sir) Frederic Moor, beaten by Captain Meyler in Natal.

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[1] Leuchars on the British side; Botha, Smuts, and Hertzog on the Boer side.

For a moment Botha reeled under the blow, and even meditated resignation. But as the returns came in, it was clear that his party had secured a clear working majority.[2] No other Ministry was possible; and so

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[1] By 95 votes. The figures were:—

Sir Percy Fitzpatrick (W.)	1231
Louis Botha (W.)	1136

[2] Of 13. The numbers were:—

South African Party	67
Unionists	37
Natal Independents	13
Labour	4
	121

he decided that it was his duty to go on. He found a seat at Losberg, and took his place in the new Assembly as Leader and Prime Minister. The Senate had been wisely and carefully selected by him—a really "Best Man" chamber—earlier in the year, as the Union Act provided.

The task that now lay before Botha was not easy or simple. He was called to the highest place in the government of a country inhabited by two races quite recently divided by a great war. He had to combine in his administration the interests of four Provinces notoriously and conspicuously conflicting. He had to maintain the ascendancy of the enfranchised white man over an almost unenfranchised black population more than three times as numerous. At the same time he had to see that that great black population was governed with justice and sympathy. Last, but not least, he had to hold the balance between the claims of the old Boer agricultural population and the great industries of the Rand, where the claims of Labour presented a problem quite new to South Africa.

The Natal Independents were returned largely by a Dutch vote, and were sympathetic with Botha.

The figures by Provinces were:—

Province.	Nat.	Unionists.	Inds.	Labour.
Cape	29	21	1	—
Transvaal	20	12	—	4
Orange Free State	16	1	—	—
Natal	1	4	12	—

In a word, Botha now found himself the ruler of a country which was a veritable whirlpool of shifting racial and social currents; perhaps the most puzzling country to govern of all the lands of this distracting globe yet occupied by white men. Well may he have taken a grave view of the responsibilities that lay ahead of him.

On November 4, 1910, the new Union Parliament was opened by the Duke of Connaught at Cape Town, amid the blaze of social delights in which that beautiful town knows well how to shine. The Royal Duke and Duchess brought to South Africa a message of hope and good will from King George V.

It was now necessary for Botha to move from his simple home at Pretoria into Groote Schuur, the beautiful country-house outside Cape Town left by Cecil Rhodes, with his uncanny gift of political second sight, in perpetual possession to the Prime Ministers of United South Africa. Botha's entrance into this larger home was typical of the new and fuller life which now lay before him and his family.

One of the first acts of his full Premiership was the release of Dinizulu from the imprisonment to which the Natal Government had condemned him after the troubles of 1907. Botha never forgets his friends. He now remembered those days of golden youth when, as a young pioneer, he had gone to help Dinizulu against his rebels, and had received at his hands the farm that gave him his first start in life. It was perhaps at some political risk that Botha now took Dinizulu from prison, gave him a pension and placed him on a farm.[1] But Botha has the quality rare among rulers of always being willing to take risks in favour of mercy and clemency. All through his career and ever since—in the release of his blackmailer, the recall of the deported men, and the amnesty to De Wet—he has always shown towards his enemies that large spirit of forgiveness and oblivion which is, after all, perhaps, a surer engine of peace than all the busy mechanism of hatred and revenge.

The first session (1910–11) of the South African Parliament was spent in putting its house in order. There were many officers to be appointed and many regulations to be made. Botha wished to elect Beyers Speaker of the Assembly—a wise proposal—but he was beaten in the party caucus meeting by Mr. Merriman and the Cape members, who perhaps thought that the Transvaal had secured enough. So the Speakership was given to Mr.—now Sir James—Molteno, and the Presidency of the Senate to Dr. F. H. Reitz. It was decided that in South Africa, as in Canada, the proceedings of the Parliament should be conducted in either of two languages—a decision in conformity with the spirit of the South Africa Act, which had already extended the bilingual rule very far.[2] The same spirit has run through all the legislation, and has governed in different degrees the Education policy of the Provinces.[1]

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[1] A deputation of the King's wives came to Botha to express their thanks. Mrs. Botha entertained them to coffee and jam sandwiches.

[2] Clause 137.

One of the most significant incidents of the session was a struggle over a Land Settlement Bill, during which Hertzog took up an extreme Afrikander position, denouncing British immigration as a trick for lowering wages, and boldly attacking the capitalism of the Rand as anti-national and anti-patriotic. It was a straw to show the way of the wind.

In May, 1911, it became necessary for Botha to visit England once more in order to attend the quadrennial Imperial Conference of the Prime Ministers of the Empire.

This was his third visit to Great Britain since self-government had been given to the Transvaal, and Botha has thus enjoyed rare opportunities of keeping in touch with the centre. There were, of course, perils in these frequent absences. Our Imperial Conferences have one grave drawback—the danger that comes to these small societies from the withdrawal of local leadership. We have seen how tares could be sown in the wheat while the owner was across the ocean; and now again the sowers were busy. Never, indeed, did Botha now, any more than in 1907 and 1910, forget the rock from which he had been hewn. Never, at the headiest moments of applause and acclaim, did he in the central gatherings of our Imperial Babylon forget the call of his own little distant farmer people. But, despite all, not even such transparent fidelity could save him from misunderstanding. In his absence the impression was sedulously cultivated by the extremists in South Africa that the charmers were piping him away from his own flock. Such seeds were destined to bear disastrous fruit.

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[1] Primary education has been left for the present to the Provinces. The Transvaal has enacted that every pupil shall be educated in his or her home language, with an arrangement that the majority in a class shall be adopted. (No. 5 of 1911.) The Orange Free State had passed a far more exacting ordinance (No. 35 of 1908), under which it practically becomes necessary, on demand, for every teacher to teach in both languages.

He was still a sick man; and he was glad to be able to re-visit Kissingen, an old haunt of his which always rested and refreshed him. The labours of the last few years had told on his strength; and he had suffered from an attack of ptomaine poisoning.

But these troubles did not divert him from his great task of asserting for the South African Union her full and proper place in the Empire. He had many vital questions to discuss and decide—the naval defence of South Africa; her share in decisions of Foreign policy; her claim to be consulted in African matters. He secured on this visit an agreement that South Africa should be consulted in regard to all frontier matters south of the Equator; and she has, as a matter of actual fact, been so consulted since 1911 in regard to Walfisch Bay, the Portuguese Colonies, and German South-West Africa. Thus Botha was already achieving for his own country new place and power in the councils of the Empire. He was staking out claims for the Continent of Africa.

On the other hand, he was then, as ever, opposed to the passion for Imperial centralisation which had found so much favour among some of the leaders in Australasia, and especially in New Zealand. Sir Joseph Ward, the Prime Minister of that Colony, moved a resolution at this Conference of 1911 in favour of immediately creating an Imperial Council with full powers of control over the Dominions. Such a change, at that moment, threatened grave injury to Botha's policy in South Africa, which was a delicate equipoise between the claims of race and Empire. It was necessary for him at once to speak out boldly for the older and saner traditions of local self-control; and he did so in a speech which showed that this recruit already held the key to the secrets of our Empire as firmly and soundly as any veteran :—

> "It is the policy of decentralisation that has made the Empire, the power granted to the various peoples to govern themselves. It is the liberty which these peoples have enjoyed and enjoy under the British flag which has bound them to the Mother Country. The premature creation of such an Imperial Council would tend to make the connection onerous and unpleasant to the Dominions. Let us beware of such a result. Decentralisation and liberty have done wonders. Let us be very careful before we in the slightest manner depart from that policy. It is co-operation and always better co-operation that we want, and that is what we must always strive after."[1]

There is no doubt that this powerful speech of

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[1] Minute No. 559. Conference Blue Book.

Botha's, supported by Mr. Asquith from the chair in a weighty summing-up, proved fatal to this proposal.

Botha was now, indeed, walking on a tight rope between the extremes of Imperialism and Nationalism. It happened during this absence of his in England that one of the leading newspapers in the Transvaal, *The Volkstem*, laid down the doctrine that South Africa need not take part in an Imperial war. This would not have mattered so much if *The Volkstem* had not maintained that Botha agreed with this view. Botha hastened to issue a contradiction, which was cabled from England. "There was no such thing," he wired, "as optional neutrality." When he reached South Africa he took the occasion to speak out even more clearly on this vital matter. "Should the unhappy day ever dawn," he said, "when the common Fatherland is attacked, Dutch and English Afrikanders will be found defending the Fatherland to the very last." A notable vow—which, since that day, Botha and his people have sealed with their blood.

During this stay in England Botha was, in 1911 as in 1907, the central figure among the Colonial Premiers. The romance of his rise to power, the memories of the past, and, perhaps, some slight and natural British complacency at the winning of so great a friend, made him always the popular hero. He was feasted at the Reform Club, and dined at Norfolk House; he was given degrees by the great Universities of England and Scotland; he was presented with the "freedom" of Glasgow. He was the guest of great English nobles, and he was the centre of many public banquets.

Take one of these—the luncheon given to him by the Eighty Club at the Hotel Cecil on May 27. It was the sequel to a historic dinner given to him and his fellow-Premiers by the same club of April 16, 1907, when Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman took the chair. On that occasion Botha had solemnly thanked Campbell-Bannerman on behalf of his nation for the grant of self-government. "We shall prove by our acts," he had said, "that we are worthy of the confidence reposed in us." Four years had now passed; Campbell-Bannerman was dead, and Mr. Lloyd George was taking his place in the chair. Botha was able to record the success of the great policy which Campbell-Bannerman had initiated. In those four years the grant of self-government to the Transvaal had led direct to the Union of South Africa—hitherto the distant dream of all who had loved that land. Botha was able to bear witness that he now received the help of English as well as Dutch; and that the leaders of the two races were now combining to banish racialism from South Africa. He now spoke with the same note of assurance. "We only ask for time," he said, "and to be left alone; and then we shall show you what wonders we can do in that part of the British Empire." He ended on a note of affection to Great Britain. "There is only one message," he said, "I have to bring from South Africa, and that is the offer of the hand of brotherhood, friendship, and of love of our people towards yours." No wonder that this straight and simple speech was received with a hurricane of applause.[1]

While he was in London this time, Botha carried forward another scheme of organisation on which his heart was set. In 1907 a conversation had taken place between Botha and Lord Haldane in which there had been outlined a general scheme of defence for the Empire. Lord Haldane, who was then the central brain of those great plans of defence which alone have saved the Empire in the great war, threw himself cordially into Botha's proposal; and as a consequence Lord Methuen was sent out to South Africa in the following year to work out details of defence with General Botha and General Smuts. In the meantime, Lord Haldane had drawn all the other Dominions into the scheme; and in July, 1909, when Botha had visited London to discuss the details of the South Africa Act, an Imperial Defence Conference was assembled at the Foreign Office. At this Conference important decisions were reached, and the general groundwork of a large scheme was laid down. This enterprise was now carried forward still further in the Conference of 1911. A further Imperial Defence meeting was held at the War Office, and the discussions led up to the framing of the South Africa Defence Bill, which was first introduced into the Union Assembly during this year and was passed into law in 1912. That was the Act which supplied Botha with the force which has enabled him to play his part in the Great War. To such large issues did these 1911 talks with Lord Haldane lead.

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[1] See the reports of these speeches published by the Eighty Club, 1907 and 1911.

Botha arrived in South Africa on August 29. His health was now greatly improved. "I am ready to be inspanned again," he said cheerfully to his friends. He was received with enthusiasm—lunched by the Bond at the Cape—and received at his constituency (Losberg) by "a procession of carts and carriages a mile long."[1]

Imperial honours were now offered to him; but he refused all titles. There was only one honour which drew him, and that was the offer of an Honorary Generalship in the British Army, never before offered to anyone outside the sacred circle of Royalty. He accepted this new position; and on the whole the promotion was popular in South Africa.

Botha was now, in 1911–12, coming face to face with those grave and deep problems which arise in the government of that land owing to the differences of colour and of civilisation among the human beings who inhabit it.

Over all these problems there always looms the great overshadowing fact that in British South Africa eight out of every ten of the inhabitants are black.[2]

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[1] *South Africa.*

[2] The census of 1911 showed that there were 6,000,000 black and 1,300,000 white inhabitants south of the Zambesi.

Perhaps, happily for South Africa, the three native territories—Bechuanaland, Basutoland, and Swaziland—had been left by consent outside the Union, and still remain under the Imperial Government. But Botha still found himself within the Union, with a population of nearly 5,000,000 blacks as against 1,250,000 whites to govern and administer.[1]

The natives in South Africa vary from a degree of relatively high education to great backwardness; and it is indeed difficult to apply to their case any common policy. Botha has always been a follower of the old Boer "fatherly" policy towards the black races. Perhaps for that very reason he has always stood for justice and equity in white dealings with the blacks. Of late years he has leant towards a policy of segregation, and has now passed an Act with that end in view. The model of such a policy is to be found in Basutoland and in the Transkei. In those countries the black man can enjoy far larger rights of self-government, both moral and legal, precisely because he is alone and apart from the whites. Such segregation has obvious dangers; but its advantage is that the black man can enjoy his own laws and customs, and his own land tenure. He can, in short, possess Home Rule. Is that to be the future of the black race in South Africa?

There are still in South Africa deep and searching differences of opinion on this question—grading from those who hope to attain equality through education between white men and black down to those who regard the difference of colour as fundamental and unchangeable. The men of the Cape lean towards equality; the men of the Transvaal to distinction. But the extreme views are all in process of abatement; and before the end agreement may be reached. It is clearly a question that South Africa must in the main settle for herself.

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[1] Census of 1911.

She has always before her the sombre spectacle of the southern States of America, where the too precipitate gift of the franchise to the blacks has since been modified by the shot-gun and the fiery stake.

There was another problem of colour facing Botha —the trouble of the imported Indian coolie. The tendency of the white man in South Africa to rely upon the labour of other races for their comfort and sustenance does not stop short with the black man. The Natal planters and coal-owners have not found the supply of black labour sufficient for their needs; and they have called for a continuous supply of indentured labour from India and the Malay States.

This human flow from East to West is a very old story. Anyone who glances at a map of the earth will see how easily accessible to Asia—and especially to India—is the east coast of South Africa. Trade has flourished between the two Continents from Biblical times onward. There has always been a constant Portuguese traffic between Goa and Delagoa; and the long use of the Cape by the Dutch and British as a half-way house to the East has quickened the overflow westward from the vast human reservoirs of the seething East. Hence the drift of Indian traders to Natal, where shop-keeping as well as labour has largely passed out of the hands of the white races. These Indians brought their families and came in increasing numbers. The Census of 1911 revealed so rapid an increase since 1901 that they now largely outnumbered the white inhabitants. The white man in Natal found himself not only engulfed in a multitude of black natives but in danger of being also submerged by Indian immigrants.[1]

The fears of the white man had already led to a gradual tightening up of the restrictions and disabilities for the Indians, both in Natal and in the Transvaal. The law varied greatly in all the Provinces; but there were, except in the Cape, many humiliating conditions of life—the finger-print test, inseparably associated in India with the criminal law;[2] the £3 licence, practically a poll-tax; and, in the Transvaal, oppressive marriage and trade restrictions. The Transvaal had in 1907, while still a Colony, passed a very stiff law to keep the flood of Indians from penetrating beyond Natal.

Such was the condition of things in South Africa as a whole when the Union came into being. It now (1910) became necessary to unify the law of South Africa. Gradually out of this necessity, there arose a very delicate situation between different parts of the Empire. Natal now wished to obtain the coolies without their families; but the Indian Government refused to give permission. Public opinion in South Africa was dead against the "open door." There was the white man's terror of being swamped; and, reinforcing it, the black man's jealousy of any privilege being given to the Indian, whom the haughty Zulu regarded as a low-born alien. The general feeling was in favour of adopting the Australian Alien Law, which applies an education test to all immigrants. But for the moment (1911) the Union Parliament had no leisure to legislate on this question. A temporary arrangement was arrived at between Ghandi, the Indian leader, and General Smuts, who conducted most of these negotiations. It gave some relief to the well-educated Hindoo, but it left the grievance of the respectable Indian trader untouched.[1]

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[1] 133,000 Indians and Asiatics to 98,000 Europeans. The natives at the same time numbered 962,000.

[2] A method that had some time before been most ingeniously applied to the detection of criminals in India by Sir Edward Henry, who has since adopted it at Scotland Yard.

The quarrel was now spreading outside South Africa to the Empire at large. India took up the case of the Indians with the fervour of a growing nationalism; and awkward questions began to be asked about the realities of Imperial citizenship. The Indian Government and Viceroy took up the cause of the Indians and complained loudly to the Imperial Government. That Government—like an anxious, flustered mother, striving for peace among her children—pleaded patiently with both sides for compromise.

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[1] The well-educated Indians were freed from the necessity of finger-prints. Deported Indians were allowed to return, and Indians who had refused to register were allowed to apply again.

In June, 1913, the Union Government passed an Act which brought some improvements to the Indians, but certainly left a great many grievances unsettled.[1] The disappointment of the Indian population resulted in a great passive resistance movement. One of the provisions of the law was that every Indian should possess a licence before entering the Transvaal. Ghandi determined to defy that provision. He put himself at the head of a dramatic procession of 2,500 Indians through Laing's Nek into the Transvaal—a new "passive" type of invasion. The Mayor of Volksrust, the frontier town of the Transvaal, happened to be a very stiff-lipped Labour leader, who instantly summoned all the white men on the countryside to meet in the Market Square and oppose forcible resistance to the Indians. The licences were demanded. None of the Indians possessed them. Ghandi was thrown into prison, and the movement was checked.

Then came the famous Indian "strike" in Natal, which for the moment threatened a paralysis of trade and industry. There were riots and imprisonments; and the agitation, fed from both shores of the Indian Ocean, looked grave and menacing. The Viceroy of

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[1] It opened the door a little wider, but enforced an education test, excluded undesirables, deported offenders, and prohibited farming, trading, and land-holding to Asiatics in the Free State.

India, Lord Hardinge, who had always taken the strong pro-Indian view, issued his famous protest on behalf of the Indian race—a protest which was received by the South African Ministry with some resentment.

But Botha and his Ministry did not allow themselves to be moved by any passing emotion from their policy. Lord Gladstone steadily strove for peace; and Botha heartily concurred. While steadily asserting the law against the violence of the Indian agitators, Botha welcomed any suggestion towards the restoration of harmony. He accepted Lord Gladstone's suggestion of a Commission, and readily agreed that a high Indian official[1] should sit side by side with eminent South Africans in order to find a way out. There could not have been a better proposal for soothing angry feelings on both sides; and gradually through 1913-14 there was a movement towards settlement, splendidly helped by the labours of General Smuts.

Botha persuaded Natal to accept the findings of the Commission, and in July, 1914, the Union Government passed through Parliament a measure of appeasement, long after other and graver troubles had thrown the Indian difficulty into the shade. Many concessions were made in this Act, and the hateful licence was abolished. Ghandi accepted it as a "Magna Charta of Indian liberty in South Africa"; and so for the time one very grievous and threatening peril was averted. Working together, Botha, Smuts, and Gladstone had gone a long way to settle one of the great race troubles of South Africa.

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[1] Sir Benjamin Robertson, Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces, who did very good work.

Once more Botha had displayed himself as a great "smoother"—one who throws oil on troubled waters. But long before the Indian problem had reached its crisis, he was faced by other dangers far more acute and perilous, applying searching tests to the very existence of the South African Union.

CHAPTER XII

THE HERTZOG SPLIT (1912)

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"Fame, if not double-faced, is double-mouthed,
And with contrary blast proclaims most deeds;
On both his wings, one black, the other white,
Bears greatest names in his wild aery flight."
—JOHN MILTON.

IT is with societies as with individuals. Grievous wounds sometimes seem to be healed for ever; the skin has grown over them and the torn tissues have joined together; there are moments when, in the flush of health and strength, the very fact of the wound is forgotten. But then come other moments, perhaps of strain and pressure, when the whole agony seems to come back. The skin breaks and the tissues crack. The blood flows. The old wound has reasserted its power.

So it has been in South Africa with the deep wound inflicted by the South African War. In the first flush of enthusiasm over the Union the effects of the hurt seemed to be disappearing. Perhaps in those years before the actual achievement of Union (1909–10) the smart was at its lowest power. The agony of racial hatred seemed to be passing away. It was Lord Selborne's impression at that time that the process of cure was going on rapidly. The women were the least placable. The ache for the lost children still lived on; even in those brighter days Rachel refused to be comforted.

But with the General Election of 1910 the whole wound began to be galled afresh. The Opposition conducted the struggle with that intense party bitterness which is the temptation of every electioneering strategist, but is full of peril to a country like South Africa. Botha was between two fires. He was trying hard to appease the extremists of his own party. But the attack of the "Unionists"[1] on Hertzog made this very difficult for him. Hertzog, a combative man, returned shot for shot; and both feeling and speech grew steadily more acute.

This revival of extreme Dutch feeling was fomented by certain religious feelings of the older Boers, supported by their Church and expressed in many villages by the Predikants. Some Dutch Reformed Churches were the rallying centres of an intense conservatism, which resented reforms of the new order as almost profane and sacrilegious interferences with the ordered life of a Chosen People. All this feeling was reinforced by the discontent of a class that was an especial product of the war, the "Poor Whites," many of whom were Dutch.

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[1] The name adopted by the South African Opposition, but with no reference to Irish Home Rule and no identification with the British party of that name.

The first hint of trouble had come to Botha over the Land Settlement controversy of 1911, when General Hertzog had so violently opposed the idea of South African help to British immigrants. On that quarrel Botha achieved a compromise. But the embers that then only glowed broke out into living flame a few months later. The incidental cause of strife arose from the proposal to enlarge the contribution of South Africa towards the Imperial Navy.

The total contribution of South Africa to the Imperial Navy is £85,000 a year, which is higher than the contribution of Canada, but lower than that of Australia and New Zealand. A substantial increase was proposed in 1912 by the "Unionist" opposition, led by Sir Thomas Smartt, the successor to Sir Starr Jameson, who had retired from ill-health. Botha was inclined to agree that South Africa ought to do more for her defence from the sea. But South Africa was at that moment taking upon itself the burden of local defence in the shape of the new Defence Act, which laid upon South Africans the ultimate duty of compulsory service for the defence of their own country.[1] By that great measure, South Africa was taking on herself a new burden of £500,000 a year. The Land Settlement Act would cost £1,000,000 a year for five years. The Union finance had not yet reached a stable equilibrium, and the year before the war showed a deficit of over £300,000. It was reasonable, therefore, that Botha should plead for delay in facing a great new obligation. Smartt, however, pressed his motion and was defeated by 56 votes to 35.[1]

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[1] Enacting compulsion for South African defence as a last resort in case of volunteers proving insufficient, and extending it in case of war to all between 17 and 60.

In the course of these discussions Botha laid down his own naval policy for South Africa, which was that the Union should build a Navy for its own protection—a plan already put forward by Sir Wilfrid Laurier for Canada, and actually adopted by Australia with vital results in the great war. It was this proposal which instantly awoke the violent hostility of General Hertzog, at that time still a member of Botha's Cabinet. Hertzog scented Jingoism, or at the least, Imperialism. South Africa was to be sacrificed to the Empire. While still within the Cabinet, he began to speak openly and defiantly. "Imperialism," he said at Rustenburg on December 8, "is only important to me when it is useful to South Africa." He attributed the movement for a bigger Navy to the capitalists of the Rand. He refused to be drawn into the intrigue. Then speaking more openly a few days later he openly laid down as his ideal for South Africa the now famous "two-stream" policy—"Two nationalities each flowing in a separate channel."

These speeches of General Hertzog instantly brought about that kind of inner political disturbance known as a Cabinet crisis. They destroyed that delicate balance of South African forces which had been created by General Botha. The first sign of the crisis came from Natal. Colonel Leuchars, a soldier who had succeeded Sir Frederick Moor as the representative of Natal in the Cabinet, demanded a withdrawal of the opinion expressed by General Hertzog. General Hertzog refused to withdraw, and Colonel Leuchars resigned. It was clear that General Botha's Cabinet was in danger. The Unionist policy of driving a wedge between the parties seemed to be succeeding.

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[1] On March 26, 1912.

Following ordinary precedents, Botha would have got rid of both Leuchars and Hertzog. But he could not follow any precedents. Hertzog's violent speeches, the inflamed result of bitter "Unionist" attacks, had created a new peril to South Africa. If Hertzog were to continue this policy it was clear that Botha could not any longer hold the balance. The fact of Hertzog's remaining in the Cabinet would be a new challenge to British power in South Africa—a reversal of the Treaty of 1902. It was necessary, therefore, that he should either consent to obey Botha, or leave the Cabinet.

But Hertzog had already been goaded by attack and abuse to the point of implacability; and the responsibility for what followed must be shared by those whose attacks had so seriously hampered and hindered Botha's task of pacification.

Botha asked Hertzog to modify his speeches. Hertzog replied, like Pilate, with a question. All he had said was that South Africa should come first:

did Botha deny that? Botha answered, "No." But Botha insisted that the discipline of the Cabinet was at stake. "The Government," he said, "must speak with one voice." So he demanded that Hertzog should write a letter promising not to speak on such matters again without the consent of the Prime Minister. Hertzog refused. Botha asked him to resign. Hertzog again refused. Botha then resigned himself. Lord Gladstone accepted his resignation, but, as he was the only possible Premier, asked him to form a new Cabinet. Botha then reconstructed his Ministry with the omission of Hertzog. Thus by this roundabout method Hertzog was expelled from the Cabinet.

Crises of this nature do not end with expulsions. Expulsion, indeed, was perhaps not altogether a misfortune for General Hertzog. It gave him martyrdom, and martyrdom was the best seed-ground for a new party if he wished to form one. For that was the point which had now been reached between the old Boer school and the new—the Hertzogites and the Bothaites.

Those who have lived through crises of this nature know that many causes go to produce them—causes that are personal and causes that are political. In such cases, these threads often become ravelled beyond all power of disentanglement. Points of principle become interwoven with the quarrels of persons; and it is often impossible to see where the principle begins and the personal issue ends. Thus even if we perceive in Hertzog's conduct some element of personal rivalry, yet it is fair and just to admit that the difference which now came to light had its origins far back. There have been phases of both sweet and bitter in the relations between the Free State and the Transvaal. The Free State had in the old days prided itself on its model administration at the time when the reputation of the Transvaal was being tarnished by rumour. Kruger had early drawn the Free State into a defensive alliance; and when it came to the moment of trial the Free State had been true—even to its own hurt. During the war the Free Staters had fought fully as fiercely as the Transvaalers; and when it came to the question of peace, the Free Staters had been for holding out when the Transvaalers had been for terms. We have seen how reluctantly in the last agony of the peace controversy the Free Staters had accepted the unwilling advice of General De Wet. Since the peace the Free Staters had been slower to accept the new situation, less contented, less resigned, less conciliatory in regard to the schools and the Civil Servants, less inclined to forget and forgive.

Not having any mines to tax, the Free State had recovered far more slowly than the Transvaal from the devastation of the war. Perhaps the selection of Botha as Premier of South Africa had awakened some twinge of the jealousies that divided the Boers in the old days. Perhaps the easy recovery of the Transvaal from its misfortunes touched some chord of envy.

Events had served to feed the fire of these discontents. Botha's frequent visits to England; his frank acceptance of partnership in the British Empire; his friendship with Jameson—all these things had quickened among the Free Staters suspicion and ill-feeling. His progressive agriculturalism was little to their taste. Now that they found that he had accepted the idea of a South African naval policy, the limit of endurance seemed to them passed. Here was an inland people, so utterly cut off from the sea that many of them had never set eyes on its blue surface: a people that still regarded sea-power as the enemy of all their hopes. The proposal that they should contribute from their narrow resources to this alien thing brought all their grievances to a head. At this moment they found a leader in General Hertzog. Thus it was that at a critical point in Botha's work of reconciliation the twist and turn of politics suddenly crystallised all the vague, wavering remnants of the old Boer feeling, and produced the hard fact of a formidable National party.

For a time the revolt was kept under by other and graver troubles—the strikes at Johannesburg. But the whole issue came to a head in 1913 at the Annual Congress of the South African Party in November. At this Congress General Hertzog and his followers determined to challenge the position of General Botha.

This was the third Annual Congress of the South African Party. It assembled in the very heart of Cape Town, in the Hofmeyr Hall, next to the great Metropolitan church of the Dutch Reformed Communion. There was a very full attendance of the party from all over South Africa, and from the beginning the diligent scrutiny of the delegates' credentials showed how tight the tension had become. Both the Transvaal and the Free State delegates were in full force, each intent on backing their own champion—the Transvaalers practically unanimous for Botha and the Free Staters for General Hertzog. The delegates from the Dutch farming districts in the north of Natal were known to be divided. The issue rested with the representatives of the Dutch in the Cape Province, who provided by far the largest delegation in the South African Party meeting. No one knew how they would vote.

The leaders of both sides were conspicuous on the platform to the right and left of the Chairman. Prayers were uttered; letters and telegrams were read from the back veldt, often referring the Congress, after the old Boer fashion, to texts in the Bible as guides to judgment; and then the grim secular fight began.

It was opened by General De Wet. He stepped in front of the platform, a grim figure of resistance, and proposed a motion which was practically a vote of censure on General Botha. The Government was to be asked to resign; President Steyn was to be invited to become leader of the party outside Parliament; and Steyn was to be asked as his first duty to nominate a Prime Minister acceptable to both wings of the party.

Faced with this instant challenge, Botha met it without flinching. He told the Congress clearly and frankly that he stood for the unity of South Africa —unity and conciliation between the British and Dutch races. General Hertzog's speeches had endangered that unity. Botha had felt compelled to make plain the issue between them. He defended Hertzog's expulsion from the Cabinet; but denied that there was any personal feeling against him. Then he dwelt on the effects of the resolution. If it were carried, the Government would have to resign. But he was not content with this negative. He went on to make an offer. If General Hertzog would agree, they should appear together before a Commission of seven members of the party, with the object of finding a way out from their unhappy differences. In other words, Botha offered to accept arbitration; and the offer was in tune with the mood of the meeting. The rank and file now began shouting for Hertzog, clearly hoping that the Free State leader would accept the olive branch held out to him by General Botha.

When Hertzog stepped forward the contrast between the men became vivid. Botha, soldier and statesman, strong, thick-set, well-built, had faced the audience with a frank, determined gaze, speaking simply, plainly, and clearly. There now advanced to the edge of the platform a man in every way contrasted to Botha—a thin, eager, nervous man—fluent and clever, but with little of Botha's weight and solidity of character. Hertzog's speech was one long outpouring of grey complaint; and as it went on it became clear that Hertzog had made up his mind to a definite parting of the ways. On personal grounds he would be willing to give Botha his hand (cries of "Do it now!"), but on political grounds he must withdraw it. (No movement of the hand.) His case against Botha was that he was too kind to the Unionist opposition—that he was playing up to the spirit of Imperialism—that he had been captured by the forces at the centre of the Empire. There was a subtle appeal to the old Boer independence, with a refrain of memories from all the tragedy and bitterness of the South African War.

For several days this great struggle went on; and Botha, never leaving his place, listened unmoved to all the speeches. The division between the Free Staters and the Transvaalers gradually widened; and there were even to be heard in the lobbies and corridors eager arguments as to whether the Free State or the Transvaalers had made the greater sacrifice during the war. For the first time the whisper was heard—that whisper which became a shout in the subsequent rebellion—that the Treaty of Vereeniging had no binding power because it had been imposed by force.

But meanwhile the Cape Dutch delegates sat listening, taking little part in the debate, but slowly swinging in opinion towards Botha, with his broader outlook and that constant appeal of his to the spirit of pledged constancy which is after all the deepest and strongest instinct of the Dutch race.

As General Botha moved about Cape Town in the intervals of the sittings, there were many signs that he was winning his way with the South African people outside his own Province. The Cape shop-keepers and the Cape farmers openly avowed themselves more sympathetic to him than to the leaders of the old South African Unionist party—a party that had not been able to resist the tendency to alliance with those two unpopular forces, the Rand capitalists and the Natal planters. There were even signs of secession from the Unionist party itself at the Cape as they watched day by day the struggle between Botha and the extreme Nationalists. Many began to talk of leaving their own party and joining Botha. Perceiving this, Botha's advisers decided to select a Cape delegate to wind up the debate on Botha's behalf. They chose Mr. Burton, the Minister of Railways. He opened with a reference to a revered memory, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, whose name as the founder of the New South African liberties was received with a remarkable outburst of enthusiasm from all sections. Botha's duty to South Africa, said Burton, was to make an end of racialism; and General Hertzog's charge of Imperialism was a red herring drawn across the track of conciliation. Burton then told the meeting plainly that the exclusion of General Hertzog from the Cabinet was the act, not of General Botha personally, but of the whole Cabinet, which was united in opposition to General Hertzog's "two-stream" policy. No one in the Cabinet, he declared, had been more determined to get rid of General

Hertzog than the late Mr. Sauer, who was known in the Cape Colony to be an uncompromising friend of the Boers, and quite above all suspicion of Imperialism. No fact could have brought more vividly home to the Cape Dutch the true meaning of the situation, or made them realise more sincerely the reasonableness and necessity of Botha's conciliation policy.

Botha's proposal for a Commission was carried; but Hertzog refused to appear before it, so that it was unable to suggest a solution. Debate had gone on long enough, perhaps too long. A motion was made that the Government should proceed with the business of administration—practically equivalent to what is known in England as "the previous question." It was a critical moment. Every delegate gave his vote separately; for it was realised that these votes were momentous to the future of South Africa. It was the parting of the ways for many. As the votes proceeded, the issue hung in the balance; there would be no great majority for either party. Then the Botha party forged ahead and finally won by 131 to 90.

The declaration of the result was followed by a remarkable and dramatic scene. The followers of General Hertzog all stood up, hesitating as to whether they should leave the Congress or not. The issue was vital; they had defied the Botha leadership and it seemed difficult for them to remain sitting under it. General De Wet decided the matter for them. Pushing his way to the back of the hall he turned and waved his hand to the chairman, shouting, "Adieu! Adieu!"

Then his followers rose in a body and left the hall in silence. Out of the 90 who voted against Botha, 50 belonged to the Free State; and thus it was clear that the situation amounted to a secession of that province from the Botha party. There was a pause of silence when the Free Staters left the room.

General Botha then stepped into the breach. He rose and asked the chairman to call on the next business, the election of the party committee. It was a bold move for the undoing of the Hertzog party; and it split them in twain. Many of those who had voted with General Hertzog were not now prepared to leave the party; and those who had remained in the hall called for an adjournment until they could consult with their friends. Botha conceded the adjournment and many of the opposition came back at the adjourned meeting. But General Hertzog and his friends never entered the Congress again; and from that moment forward he and General De Wet began to form the nucleus of that formidable new party which has been the political shadow of so many grave events.

At the adjourned meeting, Botha very characteristically swung back to conciliation. He was far too big a man to regard lightly the prospect of a split in his party. He was again all for peace. Even at the eleventh hour he tried to preserve unity. He went so far as to support the nomination of both General Hertzog and General De Wet as members of the Executive Committee of the party. Then he threw open the Congress for delegates to question him on all points of his policy as Prime Minister, even down to the minutest detail. For hours he sat answering questions of every kind—urban, agricultural, social, economic—all the details of South African housekeeping—patiently and good humouredly playing the part of the servant of the nation. This prolonged catechism he faced without flinching—promising, explaining, assenting, consenting, and, hardest of all, when necessary, refusing.

The result was that some of the Hertzogites began to return to the discussions. They were humanly anxious to hear Botha's replies. They were subdued by his untiring placability. So he gradually began to detach members from the new party, and to diminish the importance of the split.

Never did Botha make a more masterly display of his parliamentary powers than in this great effort to save his party. It was not a moment for standing on pride or dignity. He was truly battling for the soul of a nation. With our knowledge of subsequent events we can now realise that on those African summer days in Cape Town Botha was fighting to save South Africa. He already must have seen the infinite peril of this new movement. He must have already realised that its only logical conclusion was the rebellion which it actually produced.

But it was a moment for patience. The curse of

South Africa up to that time had been precisely the impatience of its rulers. Hence a certain readiness to appeal to force and to rely upon force had become the ingrained political habit of the South African, whether Dutch or English. Perhaps it was a tradition handed down from slave-owning days. But it was necessary for Botha to cure it if he was to have a chance for his policy.

So Botha stood during those days, like Aaron, between the living and the dead—the living hopes and dead memories—between the war that had been and the peace that was to be.

There were extreme men on both sides who looked at the peace merely as a truce, and were ready to fly again at one another's throats. It was Botha's greatness that he saw in that policy the seeds of ruin for South Africa.

But it was useless to be angry. Botha's duty was to persuade. He had to deal with a public that knew little of Parliamentary Government, and still less of the British Constitution. They knew Botha only as their leader, and they were feverishly anxious and jealous of his troth. He had to make clear to them his duties as a British Dominion Prime Minister, not merely to them but to the Empire. He had to educate his masters.

He made the effort. In clear and simple language he explained to them his new position and responsibilities. He spoke of his duty to the King as well as to Parliament and to Party. He pointed out that neither in South Africa nor even in Great Britain could any Prime Minister appoint his own successor.[1] He spoke earnestly and persuasively. He showed no anger against those who had left. He wound up, as he had begun, with a plea for conciliation; and the Congress ended very seriously, very solemnly—as it had begun —with a prayer.

Thus, in this characteristic way, these men parted, the friends and comrades of other days—Botha and De Wet—each to his own tent. It was a difference of temperament as well as of principle. A stern, silent, brooding man, De Wet had allowed the imagined wrongs of his country to eat into his soul during the years of detachment through which he has lived since the war. More of a soldier and less of a statesman than Botha—far less a man of the world—De Wet had never really consented to surrender. He had given way against his will. He and "President" Steyn had stood, remote and forlorn, following an impossible policy in a changed world, refusing to recognise facts or to admit faults.

Botha was moulded after quite another fashion. He was always essentially a practical man—a man to recognise facts—to make the best of any situation however bad. He mourned the lost independence as much as De Wet. Through all the changes he has remained a Dutchman, a man of the "Taal," his "Queen of Languages." But he was never a man to repine or to sulk. He knew that the only true and lasting conquest—the defeat of the soul—could come by their own default, if he and his friends stood aside and handed over the new South Africa to the sole command and caprice of the conqueror. He refused to do so. From the beginning he set the example of redeeming the situation from within—of building up a larger and greater South African nation on the new ground as a composite edifice within the wide and free domain of the British Empire.

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[1] See Morley's "Gladstone," Vol. III, 512. "He (G.) told me that he had now reason to suppose that the Queen might ask him for advice as to his successor. After some talk, he said that if asked he should advise her to send for Lord Spencer. As it happened, his advice was not sought."

It was only by the good fortune of possessing such a man at this moment that South Africa was destined to pass unscathed through the fiery trials that now awaited her.

CHAPTER XIII

THE LABOUR CRISIS (1913–14)

CHAPTER XIII

THE LABOUR CRISIS (1913-14).

"If we command our wealth, we shall be rich and free; if our wealth commands us, we are poor indeed."

—EDMUND BURKE.

EARLY in 1913, before the Hertzog split had reached its final crisis, General Botha was faced with a situation of even greater immediate gravity in the quarrel between Capital and Labour on the Rand.

Imagine for a moment that the great coal and iron industries of Great Britain were owned and financed by groups of cosmopolitan companies, controlled from distant centres in remote Continents. It is probable that such companies would exercise a formidable influence over British Governments. For it is inevitable that those who own the resources of a country should have a potent voice in its fortunes.[1]

But of such a nature is the actual ownership and control of the South African Rand Mines, those still unplumbed sources of wealth which already stretch for over fifty miles along the Reef and supply nearly half of the world's gold. However freely we may admit all the benefits of labour and revenue which South Africa derives from these mines and from the capital that works them, it still remains a grave matter for that country that the control of her wealth should rest so largely in alien hands.

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[1] So seriously is this possibility regarded in Norway, for instance, that one great party, the Conservatives, are in favour of the restriction of ownership to nationals.

Consider, for example, the effect of this situation on the outlook of Labour. It is already difficult enough in any modern community for the workman to feel the same regard for a Company as for an individual employer. But the difficulty becomes nigh to an impossibility when the object is a foreign Stock Exchange. It is useless to ask a man to cultivate respect or affection for a Kaffir Market.

So in South Africa the modern Labour problem has developed a phase peculiarly acute and perilous, because free from the restraining loyalties of a common patriotism.

Here, then, was one of the first problems that lay before the Union Government. The very city of Johannesburg itself—with the motley population that swarms in its streets, the masses of hired black labourers penned at night like folded sheep, the fringe of criminals and miscreants drawn by the scent of the earth-treasure—stood out as a challenge to the power of the new order. The Transvaal, whether as Republic or as Colony, had signally failed to control the Rand. Would the Union be strong enough? That was the question now in front of Botha.

Labour was now feeling the stirrings of the great new birth which had come to South Africa as a whole. For there had now (in 1912-13) sprung up on the Rand a Labour movement indifferent to the race quarrel—South African in its nature, but violent in proportion to the bitterness and intensity of its disappointment with the results of the war—cosmopolitan in its leadership, but easily subject to new and perilous influences.

The grim central fact on which this new movement concentrated its fury at this moment happened to be the spread of the White Death[1] among the underground workers. From the recesses of the mines this new horror had emerged, and seemed to be growing into a more awful peril as the industry delved deeper into the Reef.

Those who are familiar with Cornwall and Cornish life will know that there returns from South Africa to that beautiful English county a trickle of young men in the prime of life, upon whose cheeks there already flames the hectic flush of death. They look strong; but their lungs are rotted with the mine-dust of South Africa. They went forth with all the hopes of Eldorado to a country where the solid earth is literally built on buttresses of gold. That gold has brought with it the touch of death, and they come back only to die.

But they do not all return to Cornwall. Many of them still haunt the streets of the "Golden City," dwindling spectres, dying in the sight of all men. The spectacle of these doomed men in 1912 played no small part in maddening their comrades to threats and deeds of violence.

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[1] Silicosis, a disease arising from the inhaling of dust. Popularly known as "miners' phthisis."

Botha had already been prompt to act, and the mine-owners, at his instigation, had not been idle. A powerful Commission had been appointed immediately after the General Election of 1910, and this body began very soon to issue a stream of startling, peremptory reports, throwing a terrible searchlight on the extent of the evil and urging immediate remedies.[1] The new Department of Mines began immediately to enforce these remedies as orders. To relieve the distress, a contributory Insurance Act was passed through the Union Parliament in 1912. The mine-owners had opened a fine sanatorium. The whole power of the Government steadily pressed for stricter regulations of the conditions in the deep underground workings.[2]

But for the moment everything else was forgotten in the terrible revelations of the Reports. The long-smouldering fire of resentment against the mine-owners began to burst into flames; the new Trade Union grew stronger. The miners began to chaffer for new rights and privileges. They exhibited a new hostility to black labour. In the opening months of 1913 there were all those symptoms of inflammation which so often, in modern industrial communities, precede a big Labour struggle.

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[1] On examining 3,000 underground miners, the Commission discovered that 990, or a third, were suffering from miners' phthisis (p. 15). They reckoned that out of a permanent population of 12,000 miners 90 per cent. would ultimately contract this fatal disease (p. 23).

[2] The latest Reports show an improvement in the precautions and a reduction in mortality. But the Annual Report on the Insurance Act (July 13, 1914) shows 3,500 applications for relief.

The political agitation had come to little. The white workman's movement, headed by that remarkable engineer, Mr. Cresswell, had been defeated. Labour was still very weak in Parliament. But there had arisen outside a formidable and daring group of leaders, skilled in appeal to Labour, and not inclined to fear or caution.

When the actual strike came it had its origin in one of those trivial industrial skirmishes which recall the old Greek observation that great events are apt to arise out of small incidents. Early in May there broke out in one of the mines—the New Kleinfontein—an obscure squabble between the underground workers and a new, "hustling" manager with an excess of zeal to increase the production of the mine. It turned round the right to the Saturday afternoon holiday, a sacred privilege of the modern town worker. The manager grew impatient. According to the able Commission which afterwards investigated these events, he became "tactless and precipitate." He began with breaking the law; the workmen replied by defying it. The inflammation of the disturbed area became steadily worse.

Then there followed, in due and rapid sequence, all those incidents of industrial strife with which we are only too familiar in this country—the threat to strike—the refusal of the Directors to meet the men—the reply of the men by raising their demands—the mild intervention of the Government authority, pleading for peace with both parties, but with powers unequal to commanding it—finally, the sudden spread of the strike-fever along the Reef, from mine to mine. Within a few days a local quarrel had become a national menace.

Then, at the opening of June, came the strike itself, bringing with it a sudden heightening of passion, a feverish quickening of the pulse. The big body of white workmen thrown idle at the Kleinfontein Mine acted with a startling fierceness. They armed their pickets with pick-handles. They threatened the natives with dynamite. A meeting at Kleinfontein was followed by an attempt to rush the mine; and it was with difficulty that the small number of police available saved it from destruction.

A small body of resolute and violent men steadily worked towards an industrial paralysis. A body of workmen, gradually swelling to a great mob, proceeded from shaft to shaft and dragged the men out.

As the trouble increased, the authorities grew more apprehensive. Fresh police were brought up, and finally Lord Gladstone, as Governor of South Africa and entirely on his own responsibility, although on the suggestion of General Smuts,[1] but without any request from Botha, sent to his aid Imperial troops—at first 500, and in the end 3,000 in all.

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[1] See Cd. 6941. Telegram No. I. Botha, however, signed a minute asking for a second 1,000. (No. 666.)

The coming of soldiers always has an electric effect on strikers. The approach of armed men, instead of quelling and overawing the unarmed, always seems to infuriate and madden. Instantly that the tramp of marching men sounded on the Rand, a new and fiercer fever seized upon the miners. Great meetings advocated a general strike of all the workers in South Africa, including those who worked the railways, the very arteries of South African life. On July 4 the threat became a reality along the Rand, and every mine ceased work. Simultaneously a meeting was announced for that day by the Labour leaders on Market Square, Johannesburg.

Then came that confused clash of forces which was destined to take in the memories of South African labour the place held in the heart of the English working classes by such incidents as the "Peterloo massacre."[1] On such occasions events move too swiftly for judgment, and blame falters between two extremes. The first challenge to the men was the prohibition of the meeting, issued too late to be effective, and here as always arousing the deep resentment of rights assailed and privileges molested. The right of public meeting in the open air does not exist in South Africa, but depends on permission obtained. But the crowd, largely English in origin, was not in a mood to appreciate fine legal distinctions. Like all Englishmen, they regarded the right of public meeting as something more sacred than life.

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[1] The name generally given to the breaking up of the Manchester Reform meeting by cavalry on August 16, 1819. Eleven people were killed and 600 wounded.

So it was that the first spark caught the dry tinder of mob-anger and worked to a devouring flame. The crowd had already assembled when the prohibition of the meeting was declared. They would not disperse. Bold speakers addressed them from wagons. The police moved forward and tried to stop the speaking. The reply was a volley of stones and broken bottles. Then all was confusion—rushes and stampedes—ebbs and flows of helpless, storm-tossed multitudes, lashed by fear and fury. The cavalry drew their swords—a new heat of desperation seized the crowd. They began to break windows. They went on to stop the trams. They rushed the power-station and cut off the electric current. They took possession of the railway yards. They attacked the very centre and heart of Rand financial power—"the Corner House," the offices of those kings of gold, Wernher, Beit and Co.

Then began the wounding and the killing—first the wounding of the police and soldiers with stones and broken bottles, harassing and angering these men beyond human endurance. Then, in reply, the wounding and the killing of the crowd with rifle-shots, first in single firing, then in platoons. The crowd replied —for this was no ordinary crowd, this cosmopolitan gathering of adventurers, most of them trained in war

—at first with revolver shots, then with rifles and shotguns looted from the gun-shops. The unarmed then applied a weapon always in the hands of any man who has a box of matches—the weapon of fire. The Park Station was burned, and the *Star* office. On all sides there was a smashing of windows and a looting of shops. The streets were littered with dead and wounded. Johannesburg was actually in danger of destruction, with all the horrors of a sacked and assaulted town.

It was at this point in the strife that General Botha and General Smuts arrived from Pretoria; for the grave news had already reached the Administrative Capital, and General Botha had immediately decided to go himself to the scene of violence.

Lord Gladstone in his report to the Home Government gives a graphic picture of General Botha's actions on this occasion. He behaved with that cautious daring which characterises him in times of crisis. He moved freely about in the disturbed area, taking unmoved those serious personal risks which every brave man must take if he is to guide and control the passions of men. He made every endeavour to effect a settlement, with that genius for peacemaking which goes so amazingly along with his genius for war. He talked to both sides and attempted to bring them together. He found the situation "alarming in its gravity." His aim was to bring an instant end to the violence before it grew worse. If he could not effect a settlement he hoped at any rate to bring about a truce.[1]

Botha succeeded. By the following day (July 5) he had, for the moment, brought the strike to an end. He had persuaded both sides to agree that all the men should go back, or be taken back, to work. There was to be no punishment or dismissals for strike offences. The representatives of the workers were to be at liberty to lay any other grievances before the Government, who promised to inquire into them.

This agreement brought the violence to an end, at any rate for the time being. It is true that on July 6, when the terms were laid before the men, they were greeted at first with shouts of passion. During the rioting of July 4 no fewer than 20 people had been killed and 250 had been wounded, while on the side of the police there were 88 casualties out of the 264 men. On such occasions the death of men leaves between the parties a gulf which requires all the labour of the most skilful bridge-builder. "What about the shooting?" cried angry voices from the crowd when the labour leaders laid the terms before them. "What about the dead? You've been bought"; cries of suspicion from abysses of distrust and fury. On July 6 there was another outbreak of rioting, and for several days the issue hung in the balance.

But Botha knew that this was the last ground swell of the storm, and he faced the situation with that unswerving patience which Palmerston declared to be the greatest quality of the statesman. He threw aside all the pedantries of officialism and extended inquiry to the grievances of South African labour in their largest scope and interpretation. He had an open ear for all troubles. He held a Conference with representatives of all federated trades; and he listened to all the grievances and demands of the railwaymen as well as of the miners. He appointed a small, strong and sympathetic Commission[1] to inquire into the whole circumstances of the rioting; and he persuaded the mine-owners to issue a list of concessions. The fury of the extremists still raged; but for the moment there was a lull in the storm; peace prevailed, and the strikers sullenly and slowly went back to work. By August 4 the troops could be withdrawn.

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[1] See Lord Gladstone's despatch of July 7, 1913, pp. 12–16. Cd. 6942.

Then there arose a fierce debate, which spread to England, as to the employment of the troops in the shooting of civilians during these events. Lord Gladstone knew as well as any man how undesirable it is to bring soldiers into industrial strife. Doubtless, if every man had behaved with wisdom, troops would not have been necessary and no rioting would have occurred. If the employers had responded, for instance, to Botha's appeal and met the workmen, perhaps the whole trouble would have been averted. "If ifs and ans were pots and pans——" But the strike had broken out from circumstances over which the Government had no control, and in spite of their appeals for peace. They acted as far as the existing laws would allow them. Then there had broken on them the sudden blazing perils of anarchy and social dissolution in a country with a black population always on the leash.

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[1] Consisting of Sir J. W. Wessels and Mr. Justice Ward. It is from their admirable report that the facts in this narrative have been mainly drawn.

For it was no ordinary situation that had faced them—no ordinary, mild, European industrial disturbance. Behind the whites on the Rand there was a quarter of a million of these black men, the labourers of the mines, half savage, corralled in their compounds, hungry for lust and violence, their wild eyes looking through the bars of their prison at the strifes of their white masters.

By a coincidence which was probably a cause, South Africa was, at the moment of the outbreak, practically defenceless. The old forces had been disbanded, and the new citizen force under the Defence Act was not yet formed. The police were not adequate. Botha was reluctant to call out the Dutch burghers under the old commando law, lest he should fan again into flame the old racial strife. It seemed simplest to call for the aid of the Imperial troops who still remained in South Africa.

Unhappily, this quarrel was not to end with the settlement of July, 1912. Those who speak lightly of the employment of violence as an instrument of order are apt to forget the heavy and inevitable recoil. The memory of those twenty deaths worked feverishly in the blood of South Africa, and it was only a question of opportunity when another outbreak should occur. The opportunity arose in January of next year (1914) over the organisation of the South African railways under the South Africa Act. That Act placed in the hands of the Union Government the ownership of the already unified railway system of South Africa. It had been one of the special objects of the Union Convention that there should be a drastic reduction in the expenses of a very extravagant railway system. In order to place the control as far as possible outside party politics the South Africa Act had created an independent Railway Board—under a Minister—with the specific duty of reorganising the system.

The very first steps to reduction instantly brought the new Board and Minister into violent conflict with Labour. The South African Railway Board thought it their duty to dismiss sixty men doing temporary work on the Government Railways. This action was vehemently resented by the employees. Thus there sprang up a furious conflict between the interests of the community and the interests of a trade, the railwaymen advancing a theory that the Government had no right to dismiss hands without the consent of the railwaymen's Union. The secretary of the Union, Mr. Poutsma, put forward this demand to Mr. Burton, the Minister of Railways. Mr. Burton decisively refused to agree, saying that it would mean an abdication of his duty to the public. Mr. Poutsma threatened a railway strike, which the Union Parliament, by an Act passed since 1910, had declared an illegal act. The Government refused to yield. A strike was called; and the Executive of the Federation of Trades then appealed to all South African workers to support the railwaymen.

South Africa was now faced with a fearful crisis. The stoppage of the railways in South Africa has no parallel in any European possibility. It would far more than paralyse trade; to great artificially-fed communities like Johannesburg it meant the rapid approach of famine. Here you have a new type of the labour problem—the growth of industries in which strikes are impossible, and where all conflicts and disputes must be settled by processes of arbitration and conciliation. This new problem burst with a terrible suddenness on South Africa, a country mostly agricultural, and hitherto quite unfamiliar with the acute phases of labour conflict.

For the moment the extreme Labour Party ruled. The Syndicalists—for such they were—had laid their plans carefully. The strikers had almost complete control of Johannesburg. Many houses flew the red flag, and a system of permits was set up by the Strike Committee, which now regulated the whole trade of Johannesburg. This was not a moment for laying down any broad lines of settlement. It was a moment for action. The Labour forces were most carefully marshalled, and everything was prepared for revenge; they were under the control of a group of determined and vehement men who would not shrink from extreme violence. These men were now known to believe in the new and perilous doctrine that the State exists for its trades and not its trades for the State. It was therefore a question of life and death between them and the State.

Botha was not a man to go under easily. "I am a man of peace," he said once, "but if a man puts a pistol to my head, I hit back." He had at his call all the necessary machinery of prompt executive action against disorder devised and manufactured for South Africa during the South African War by the Imperial Privy Council. Perhaps he might be excused for thinking that what was good enough for Boers and Dutch rebels was good enough also for anarchists and revolutionaries.

So now he acted with swift resolution. On his advice Lord Gladstone declared martial law. Under martial law, Mr. Poutsma and a number of other leaders were instantly arrested for breaking the law prohibiting strikes on Government railways. Being unwilling again to use Imperial troops, Botha used the Defence Act for the first time, and 60,000 men were called out in the threatened areas. In reply the Trade Federation threatened a general strike. A ballot was taken, and two-thirds of the men voted for striking. Things were going from bad to worse. The railway service was now intermittent; the Basutos had broken out in one of the mines; a Committee of Public Safety had been set up at Johannesburg.

Ministers went about under arms and guards. The State was in danger.

It was on one of these days of January, 1914, that General Botha jumped into his motor at Pretoria and drove at full speed to Johannesburg. His secretary, Dr. Bok, was with him, and the strikers recognised Botha immediately. Some of the most desperate seized the car, and demanded their rights with pointed pistols. He calmly replied: "Shoot if you like; but remember I have come to make peace, and if you shoot me there will be no peace." The men lowered their weapons.

But the time for peace had not come yet. Threatened with arrest, the President and Secretary of the Trades' Federation, along with 200 of their followers, barricaded themselves in the Trades Hall at Johannesburg. A citizen Defence Force under De la Rey surrounded the hall, and machine guns were trained against the building. Faced with overpowering force the Labour leaders surrendered and were placed under arrest. Deprived of all their leaders, the workers in every part of South Africa now showed hesitation and indecision. The strike gradually collapsed, and on January 21 it was declared at an end.

It was on January 27 that Botha took that drastic step which at the time caused so much surprise and emotion throughout the Empire. Using that special interpretation of law which had been invented by the Privy Council for South Africa in order to deport

Boers and Dutch rebels, and advised by General Smuts, he applied these rulings to the Labour leaders, and deported them in a batch to England. This stroke was carried out with a ruthless and irrevocable decision. The Labour leaders were conveyed secretly to Natal and with equal secrecy placed on board a steamer going to England—the *Umgeni*. They were already on the high seas before the attention of the Courts could be called to their arrest, and they had then already gone beyond the reach of South African law.[1] Following up this action, Botha's Government refused to take a legal decision, and covered anything doubtful in their conduct by a sweeping and comprehensive Act of Indemnity.

In England these events had a violent echo in the debates of the House of Commons, where the British Labour Party for the time took up the cause of the deported men, and afterwards attempted to persuade the Government to "reserve" the Indemnity Act. But somehow when the British Labour men came face to face with the South African leaders they realised a certain difference between Labour ideas and conduct in Great Britain and in South Africa. There was an element of violence in these men that repelled the British Labour man, the child of an old and ordered community. Thus it was that very slowly British opinion swung round to the Liberal argument that South Africa ought to be left to manage its own affairs in its own way.

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[1] The names of the deported were as follows:—Messrs. Watson, Poutsma, Bain, Mason, Crawford, Waterson, Kendall, McKerrell, Livingstone, and Morgan.

Looking back on these events to-day (1916) it is clear that Botha displayed great qualities of decision and resolution. It would be flattery to deny that his action was open to criticism. But revolutionary events require revolutionary remedies; and only those who have lived in South Africa understand what the railway system means to the life of that scattered community. Who can doubt that for the moment in those critical days of the South African midsummer a grave danger menaced the Union? We now know that but for this rapidity of decision South Africa might have found herself later on threatened at one and the same time with two civil wars—one of Labour and the other of Race. It was from such possibilities of chaos that Botha saved his country.

And yet at the same time no wise man will admit that the Labour problem of South Africa can be finally settled by the use of force. If any proof were needed to the contrary, it came almost immediately after the strike in the sensational victory of the Labour Party in the elections for the Transvaal Provincial Council, on which they secured a majority of one.

Botha was ready for that result. Perhaps the greatest feature of his policy at this time was that while he wielded a sword with one hand he always held the olive branch in the other. In his large view there could be no conflict between the claim of order and the duty of redress and reform. A countryman himself, with little experience of towns or industries, he came new to these problems of labour; but he approached them with an open and sympathetic mind. He had already begun to realise the vital fact that if South Africa were to control her fate, the South African mine-owners must bow to the State. During the months that followed these disorders he drafted a series of Labour Laws marked by great strength and courage.[1] The prolonged debates over the strikes and the Indemnity Bill prevented him from passing these Bills into law during this Session of 1913. But the Bills displayed a resolution to deal with the Labour problem on the broadest and humanest lines.

It was just when he was midway in these tasks that events occurred in Europe which called him suddenly and dramatically to even graver matters.

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[1] Of these measures, one for Workmen's Compensation framed on the English Act was passed in 1914, as also a Wages Protection Act and an Industrial Disputes Act. Others have been inevitably delayed.

CHAPTER XIV

THE REBELLION (1914)

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"Unthread the rude eye of rebellion
And welcome home again discarded faith."
—King John.

General Botha was away on a holiday in Rhodesia when the news reached South Africa that Germany had, by issuing the Ultimatum to Russia, taken the first fatal step in the great European War. Two days later Great Britain declared war on Germany, and from that moment South Africa was also at war.

General Botha hurried back immediately to Pretoria and faced the situation. The tremor of this world-shaking event was already being felt throughout the Union.

Botha returned instantly to Pretoria, and summoned a Cabinet. As a result of their deliberations he cabled to London[1] that if the Imperial Government wanted to withdraw their troops for use elsewhere, South Africa would be willing to defend itself. The Imperial Government accepted the offer. The troops were now being gradually embarked at the ports, and the Defence forces were already warned for action when Parliament met in September.

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[1] On August 4, 1914. See Minute 686 in the Correspondence published in April, 1915, to the British Parliament. Cd. 7873.

But the Imperial Government had already approached Botha with a larger suggestion. Mr. Harcourt on behalf of the British Cabinet cabled to Botha on August 7 informing him that if the South African Government would seize such parts of "German South-West" as would give them command of the wireless stations, this would be regarded as a great and urgent Imperial service.[1] The South African Government "cordially" agreed on condition that the Imperial Government would undertake the naval part of the undertaking.[2] In his speech Botha clearly and firmly defended the policy he had adopted. "To my mind," he said, "there could be only one reply without creating a position of a much more serious nature than the one we are faced with."

Botha never hesitated for one moment. Why should he? In 1911 he had really anticipated the present situation when he had denounced the idea of "optional neutrality." Then he had prophesied that if ever war came to the Empire, Briton and Boer would stand "shoulder to shoulder." He was now about to show that that pledge was no idle word.

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[1] Minute No. 9/18. Id. The telegram went on:—"You will, however, realise that any territory now occupied must be at the disposal of the Imperial Government for purposes of an ultimate settlement at the conclusion of the war."

[2] Minute No. 7/18. Id. August 10.

Botha's instant decision was the more courageous since he must clearly have foreseen some of those tragic consequences which were to follow. It was no light thing for Botha to contemplate the division of his own people. He was now entering what was destined to be the grimmest episode in his whole career. Those who dream that the hearts of rulers are made of adamant can have little conception what it means for a leader of men to be asked to kill and wound his own old comrades, and to stand on the battlefield and look down on the dead bodies of men who have fought by his side in other days. Yet such was the fate that now lay ahead of Botha.

Why did the decision to invade German South-West Africa become the spark to fire a rebellion? Many reasons have been given in the British Press—German gold, Dutch treachery, personal ambitions. There are always baser threads in every strand of human life, and probably all these elements played some part in the amalgam of revolt. But he who should attribute the rebellion entirely to bribery and ambition would grievously misunderstand recent South African history. For two years past there had been, as we have seen, a definite cleavage of opinion among the Dutch as to the part that South Africa should play in the wars of the British Empire. The Hertzog split had marked the dramatic moment in that division of opinion; and Hertzog had taken with him into secession a very large part of the Orange Free Staters, and a considerable following in other districts. His arduous and strenuous campaigning had perilously revived the old Boer craving for independence and the memories of the old war. Hertzog's most definite doctrine had been that South Africa should not bleed for the Empire. His whole conflict with Botha turned round this very question of the responsibility of South Africa for Imperial quarrels. The occasion of the split had been the proposal to increase the South African contribution to the Imperial Navy. Here was the same issue—on land.

It is difficult, indeed, to estimate exactly the aims of Hertzog and his advisers. Did he mean that South Africa was to accept the defensive aid of the British Navy and contribute nothing to it? That was, indeed, to pursue a policy of subjection. Or did he mean to aim at the recovery of their lost Republican independence? If so, Hertzog was always careful to fall short of so bold a confession of faith. But it is clear that his action was so construed by thousands of the simpler folk who accepted him as their leader. Without accusing him of any direct intention to create rebellion, it is certain that the political movement which he headed played a great part in these unhappy conflicts.

The special war session of the South African Parliament now summoned by Botha was opened on September 9, at Cape Town, by Lord Buxton,[1] the Governor newly arrived in succession to Lord Gladstone.

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[1] Until recently Mr. Sydney Buxton, M.P. for Poplar, with a distinguished record as Liberal Cabinet Minister in England.

General Botha, as Prime Minister, moved an address to the King in which he pledged the loyalty of South Africa to the British cause and announced the new policy to the House. "The road of treason," he said boldly, "was an unknown road among the Dutch and English-speaking of South Africa. There were only two possibilities before them now. The one possibility was one of faith, duty and honour. The other was of dishonour and disloyalty." He would admit no doubt as to which course the South African people would follow.

He then told the Assembly that the Germans were already in force on the borders and some of them had even crossed the borders. There had already been a fight on an island between the countries, and two men had been killed. It was clearly Botha's opinion that the war in the South-West was inevitable; and he impressed that fact early on the Union Assembly. As a soldier he fully understood that there was no possible distinction between an aggressive and a defensive war. It has become a commonplace of war that to defend you must always also be ready to attack. No man knew that better than Botha.

Botha added that touch of clemency which he always mingles with his schemes of war. He ended his speech with a strong appeal for consideration towards the naturalised German citizens of South Africa. There happened to be living in Natal the descendants of the German Legion which had volunteered on our side during the Crimean War. Botha announced that these men would be exempted from service, because "surely it would not be right to make brother fight against brother, or father against sons." Here was a soldier who did not forget that even in war time he was still a man.

But no smooth words or acts could avert the crisis which was certain to follow on Botha's statement. Without any hesitation, Hertzog instantly threw himself into full opposition to the policy of aggression. He spoke against the whole proposal to carry the war into German South-West Africa. "His duty," he said, "in the first place was to his own people and not to the Empire." He went further—he refused even to decide which of the great combatants was in the right, thus openly already exercising the "option of neutrality." He now moved an amendment asserting willingness to join in all measures of defence, but protesting against a policy of attack on German territory.

This debate was the first indication of the grave difference of opinion which was now to divide South Africa. The amendment by General Hertzog was rejected by 92 votes to 12. But it was not the size of the minority that counted; it was the spirit in which they were working. The Parliamentarians seemed to be keeping within the law; but already in the month of September grave rumours began to spread that there were persons in high authority within the Union who were contemplating acts of treason. Among the names bandied about were those of General Beyers, Commander-in-Chief of the South Africa Defence Force;

General De Wet, the greatest military name in the Orange Free State; and even, according to some whispers, the great and respected Transvaaler—General De la Rey. Botha was slow to believe these rumours, but as a soldier he kept a vigilant eye upon the movements of all the suspected persons.

The first definite news of rebellion that reached him was of the certain proposed defection of Maritz.

Colonel Solomon Maritz was a Cape Dutchman, a friend of De Wet's, who had fought with distinction in the Boer War and had since served with the Germans against the Hereros. He had passed through the Military Training School at Bloemfontein, and had been appointed to the command of his own district along the north-western Cape Border. He had also joined the Hertzog party. General Beyers had recently made him Lieutenant-Colonel in command of the Union Forces on the German frontier.

It was now brought to the knowledge of the Government that Maritz was stealthily carrying with him into rebellion the majority of his officers and men.

At this critical moment, on the eve of the shedding of brother's blood by brother, General Botha made one last desperate effort to preserve peace. He sent a long telegram to "President"[1] Steyn at his farm in the Free State and implored him to intervene to prevent bloodshed. President Steyn replied to this appeal in a strange letter. He insisted that if he appealed to the people who abstained from the Rebellion he must also add that he most strongly disapproved of the policy of the Government in their attack on German West Africa. He would have to say that he had warned them against that policy three years before, and repeated the warning to General Smuts on the outbreak of the war. As a result of that policy a number of officers and men had gone into rebellion. But a letter written in the only terms possible to him would have no effect on them. He preferred to remain outside the conflict.[1]

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[1] This is a courtesy title generally given to Mr. Steyn in South Africa.

In vain did Botha endeavour to shake, by every possible argument, "President" Steyn's position. It was clear that reasoning was vain, and that besides those actually engaged in the rebellion there were those who, while taking no risk themselves, preferred to look on and to garner the fruits of that bloody harvesting.

Events moved rapidly.

The next sensation was the resignation of General Beyers, the Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Force.

General Beyers had been one of those ardent and formidable fighters who had revived the spirits of the Boer commandos during the later stages of the South African War. He was known as a rapid and efficient soldier, and it was hoped that he would lead the same commandos to victory against the Germans. But it was gradually whispered round that he was one of those who had been strongly influenced by General Hertzog's criticism of Botha's policy; and on September 22 he wrote a letter to the Government giving up his post as Commander-in-Chief. It was afterwards remembered that some time before General Beyers had visited Berlin to witness the German manœuvres and had been entertained by the German Emperor.

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[1] P. 67, "Rebellion and German War." South Africa White Paper.

At this moment there occurred an incident both tragic and mysterious. On the day on which General Beyers handed in his resignation—September 15—he sent an invitation to De la Rey to come and meet him. De la Rey replied to him at Pretoria asking him to come to Johannesburg and discuss matters. General Beyers, being unable to leave Pretoria, sent over his motor-car to fetch De la Rey. Arrived at Pretoria, De la Rey told Beyers that he was despondent and perplexed. He then went to a bedroom, fell on his knees, and prayed for guidance. Later on he took up his Bible and opened it by chance at the famous prayer of Solomon in the second book of Chronicles. He read those great chapters and became happy and contented. He had reached a decision.

The strange thing is that we shall never know quite what that decision was. For a sudden and untoward fate, both trivial and terrible, stepped between De la Rey and his design. That night Beyers was driving De la Rey back to Johannesburg in his motor-car with the object—so it is believed—of attending a meeting of commandos assembled under the Defence Act at

Potchefstroom. It is a curious coincidence that the police at Johannesburg were at the same time especially on the "qui vive" to capture three motor-burglars known as "the Foster gang," who were trying to escape. They had instructions to stop every car. Beyers' chauffeur, on the other hand, from a totally different cause, had instructions not to stop. Beyers' car was challenged several times as it passed through the suburbs of Johannesburg; but each time it ignored the challenge and went on at increased speed. One policeman stepped in front of the car and was nearly run over. He sprang aside just in time to save his life, and slipping a cartridge into his rifle he fired from behind at the car as it passed beneath the glare of an electric lamp. The car went on for a few hundred yards and then, turning slowly, came back to the policeman. "Are you going to stop this time?" said the policeman. General Beyers put his head out of the car, and said: "I am General Beyers—this is General De la Rey, whom you have shot!"

General De la Rey, indeed, was stone dead. He had been shot through the back. Some years before, an old Boer who set up to be a prophet, Van Rensburg by name, had affirmed that he had seen a vision regarding De la Rey. He had seen a cloud with number 15 on it. There was blood issuing from the cloud and General De la Rey was seen returning home without his hat followed by a carriage covered with flowers. The Boers had interpreted this as a prophecy of triumph. Now the vision had come true, but in quite another sense than triumph. A few days later, General De la Rey, perhaps happy in the moment of his death, was taken to be buried at Pretoria, followed by a carriage full of flowers. General Botha uttered the old General's funeral oration, ignoring the rumours of his defection, and dwelling only on those dazzling deeds which will always be the pride of all who live in South Africa.

At the funeral Beyers made a violent attack on those who had reproached him with the intention to rebel. Never was it more true that he who excuses himself also accuses. Within a very few weeks—by the middle of October—the full treason of Beyers, Kemp, and De Wet came to the knowledge of the Government. In vain did Botha make one last effort to employ "President" Steyn as a peacemaker. The efforts of that veiled oracle were too obviously half-hearted. The full scheme of treason, linked up with Beyers at one end and the Germans at the other, with Maritz as the handy intermediary, became gradually clear to the Government. Proclamations were issued by the rebels. The die was cast. Botha saw that there was nothing before him but to maintain the authority of the Government.

Faced with this situation, Botha instantly acted with his customary mixture of shrewdness and swiftness. The towns at this moment were full of volunteers for the German War; and the provisions of the Defence Act were already in operation. But Botha especially did not wish to use Englishmen to put down a Dutch rebellion. Except in cases where no Dutch forces were available he was determined to use men of Dutch blood only. He therefore applied for this purpose the old commando law, which practically corresponds with the old common law right of levy—the fyrdd—part of the law of England until recent days. But Botha found himself able to fill his ranks with volunteers. For these men it was necessary to find officers; so Botha went to ask his old commandants of the Boer War to accompany him on this expedition against the rebels. There were some thirty of these men, and Botha only wanted ten. He explained the position to them; and the result was that all wanted to go. Botha proposed a ballot, and the ten wanted were chosen in that manner. All the rest asked to go as troopers—a remarkable evidence of the trust in Botha's leadership that existed among his own old soldiers.

The situation was certainly becoming very grave. The rumours of German aggression, which had been very shadowy all through August, took on a very real substance in September. A British force under Colonel Grant crossing the frontier to Warmbad was left isolated by Maritz and ambushed by Germans, who thereupon marched boldly into British territory and seized a block-house on the Orange River. Maritz sent an impudent ultimatum to Botha. Meanwhile, the tide of rebellion rose high both in the Transvaal and the Free State; and it really seemed possible that unless bold and definite action were taken, South Africa would drift into anarchy and ruin. These were days of wild rumour and panic, spreading terror through a country only recently recovered from war.

The great thing was to act swiftly, before these vague groups of rebels became organised and disciplined into armies. It was known to the South African Government that the rebels lacked ammunition and arms; it was urgent that they should be broken up before they obtained these resources. The surest way to check the rebellion was to inspire confidence by a rapid defeat. For it is agreed by those who lived through that period in South Africa that Botha alone stood between the Empire and disruption. If he had spoken the wrong word, we should have lost South Africa.

General Botha first made the momentous announcement that he himself would take Beyers' place in the field. He removed the arms and ammunition up North, and brought the loyal recruits to Pretoria out of the rebel districts. He then sent an experienced soldier, Major Enslin, one of his own Staff during the Boer War, to cope with Maritz, nominally as Maritz's Chief of Staff. Major Enslin had an extremely difficult task; and it is greatly to his credit that he managed to escape with full proofs of Maritz's treason. It was to his subordinate, Major Bowyer, that Maritz showed that famous document, the unsigned draft of a Treaty drawn up between himself and the Governor of German South-West Africa, as the representative of the German Emperor. The terms of this Treaty were certainly very astonishing. Maritz was to announce the independence of South Africa and to declare war against England. The Governor of German South-West Africa was to support Maritz, and promised to obtain measures to respect the South African claim to full independence in the case of German victory. In return Germany was to have Walfisch Bay, and the new South African Republic was to be allowed to seize Delagoa Bay.

Armed with this revelation, Botha now published the facts to the world, and proceeded to strike hard and fast at the head of the rebellion. Colonel Brits was ordered to march instantly against Maritz, who had now gone into open rebellion and had brought nearly the whole of his force—except a few intrepid loyalists—over to the Germans. Colonel Brits instantly defeated Maritz in a smart action south of Upington, and during the next few weeks there was a rapid and effective concentration of troops against the rebel Colonel from all parts of Cape Colony. Thus cornered, Maritz could make no headway. Instead of striking for Pretoria, as he had intended to do, he was forced to stand at bay on the frontier. There he was severely wounded in the knee, driven to take refuge on the German side of the frontier, and afterwards, when Botha advanced into German territory, passed out of the scene of war into Portuguese Angola. His men were scattered, and that part of the rebellion was brought to an end.

But in the meanwhile far greater and more formidable leaders had entered the field—no smaller men than those old Republican veterans, Generals De Wet, Beyers, and Kemp. It is quite clear now that among these leaders there was a serious conflict of policy. General Beyers seems to have been drawn by the perilous and seductive spell of the Ulster precedent. He talked of "armed protests"; he seemed to imagine that Sir Edward Carson had invented a new half-way house between loyalty and rebellion. There was a dramatic meeting at the house of a Dutch Reformed Minister named Ferreira. At that meeting General De Wet, like Brennus at Ancient Rome, roughly threw his sword into the scales. He was a soldier; and he could see no distinction between armed protest and open war. He declared for war. Instantly after the meeting De Wet began to collect men and to commandeer supplies. General Beyers, having definitely thrown in his lot with De Wet, had no choice but to follow his lead. On October 12 the Union Government had declared martial law; on October 25 the Government had issued a grave statement announcing that De Wet had taken the field .

On the next day Botha followed up this manifesto with instant action. The rebels under Beyers were now close to Pretoria, and were actually visible from the town on the kopjes. Botha struck straight at the heart. Issuing from Pretoria with a picked force of police and burghers on October 28, he attacked Beyers and his commando at Rustenburg before noon. Still bemused with the dream of an "armed protest," Beyers' commando was utterly confounded by the attack of their Dutch compatriots, and fell into headlong rout. It was for the most part an affair of police. Eight fully-armed men were captured without a shot, and only at the end of the day, when passions were roused, was there any bloodshed. Beyers' power was already broken in the Transvaal. He fled south to join De Wet in the Free State. All the world knows how later (December 7), in one desperate effort to escape capture, he was miserably drowned in the Vaal River.

During the first few weeks after the affray at Rustenburg, Botha struck blow after blow at the forces in the Transvaal, determined first to free the administrative Capital from danger. There were, of course, strange ups and downs in this terrible warfare of brothers and cousins, where slimness met slimness and ambush ran into ambush. Botha was held back at times from crushing victory by his reluctance to employ British troops to crush Dutch; for he was still resolutely determined not to revive the embers of old race-passions. Gradually and grimly, Botha's old lieutenants achieved the mastery. By the end of November, 1914, all the rebel Transvaal leaders—Müller, Kemp, Fourie—had been put to flight or captured.[1]

Botha now turned to the Free State, where De Wet had necessarily been left to run his course. There were strange episodes of elemental fury in that wild ranging of the old guerilla chieftain. All the pent-up wrath of years seemed to burst forth. He amazed even his own followers with his fierce, frenzied speeches—such as the notorious "five shillings" speech at Vrede[1]—breathing wrath on the verge of madness. But there were deeds as well as speeches. He was still a master of war. He was soon in possession of many of the chief towns—Heilbron, Reitz, Vrede, Harrismith. The rebellion broke into flame at half a dozen places at once, and for a moment it looked as if the Free State had definitely broken away from the Union of South Africa.

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[1] Fourie, a Major in the Defence Force at the moment of his treason, was defeated at Nooitgedacht and shot at dawn.

De Wet fought and behaved with the fury of a forlorn hope. His troops caught his temper. The captured towns were submitted to looting and insult, and the loyalists of the Free State felt that they had been deserted.

Against this savagery some few places held out gallantly. Bethlehem and Kroonstad—assisted by the late General Philip Botha's gallant soldier son, Manie—organised resistance and still held back De Wet's attacks.

But it was high time that Botha himself should come to their help. He had given the rebels every opportunity for peace, again and again offering amnesty and clemency even after rebellion. All his offers had been treated with contempt. It was clear that the rebels intended war. He was now to show that the merciful can be also strong.

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[1] Where De Wet broke into a violent rage against a magistrate who had fined him five shillings for beating a black boy.

On November 11, Botha proceeded to the Free State, put himself at the head of the Government forces, and making a rapid night-march, surprised De Wet at dawn at Mushroom Valley. It was a tremendous blow. De Wet's main force of 3,500 men was broken up, and he became from this time a hunted fugitive.

De Wet now knew that he was beaten. Hitherto he had ignored all Botha's overtures. Now—perhaps encouraged by Botha's mildness even in victory—he attempted to obtain a discussion of terms. Botha replied sternly, through General Smuts, that the time has passed for anything but unconditional surrender.

So the fearful struggle went on to its bitter close, along a road marked by brothers' deaths:

> "For friend and foe were shadows in the mist,
> And friend slew friend, not knowing whom he slew."

If it were not for the horror which always haunts civil war there would be a profound interest about this final stage. Age had told on De Wet; and he was now a less agile man than at the period of his great achievements; but he still retained all the ardour and genius of a great partisan warrior. In his flight from his old comrades in arms he displayed all those gifts of rapid and perplexing movement which had puzzled so many British Generals in the past. But in this new pursuit of De Wet, the South African Governments had one great advantage which was lacking to the British Generals. They had the use of the modern motor-car. It was only thus that De Wet was finally cornered.[1]

The last phase of all in the hunting down of that indomitable old man was indeed sufficiently notable and dramatic. De Wet's commandos had been killed, captured or dispersed, and at last there remained with him only four companions. He had crossed the Vaal River, and these five men were fleeing on swift horses through the waterless, sandy tract of Bechuanaland that lies to the west of the Transvaal. On November 25 he turned to gallop westward some eighteen miles north of Vryberg in the country known as Stella Land. But this time he was pursued by a force that knew not fatigue. The motor-cars used by Colonel Brits, the actual captor of De Wet, had been specially constructed for the work of driving across this rough and broken desert. Even so the achievement was amazing. They had to face rain as well as sand; and it was not till two days that they got on to the spoor of De Wet's following. Then alternate cars moved to right and left, and in one great sweep of these mechanical pincers they crept round De Wet and his faithful companions. Even at that supreme moment the going was so bad—up hill and down dale, and through the thickest bush—that De Wet again and again eluded them. Pouring in water, "letting all out," and ploughing through the deep sand on their first gear, they went on at four miles an hour until only ten cars were left. They held every water hole; and yet De Wet still pushed on with incredible speed. Cut off from water, he determined to go forward without it. When the thirst of De Wet's companions became intolerable they killed a horse and drank its blood. But at last they stopped, utterly beaten with fatigue, at a farm named Waterbury, where they slept the sleep of utter exhaustion. The old warrior was dead-beat at last.

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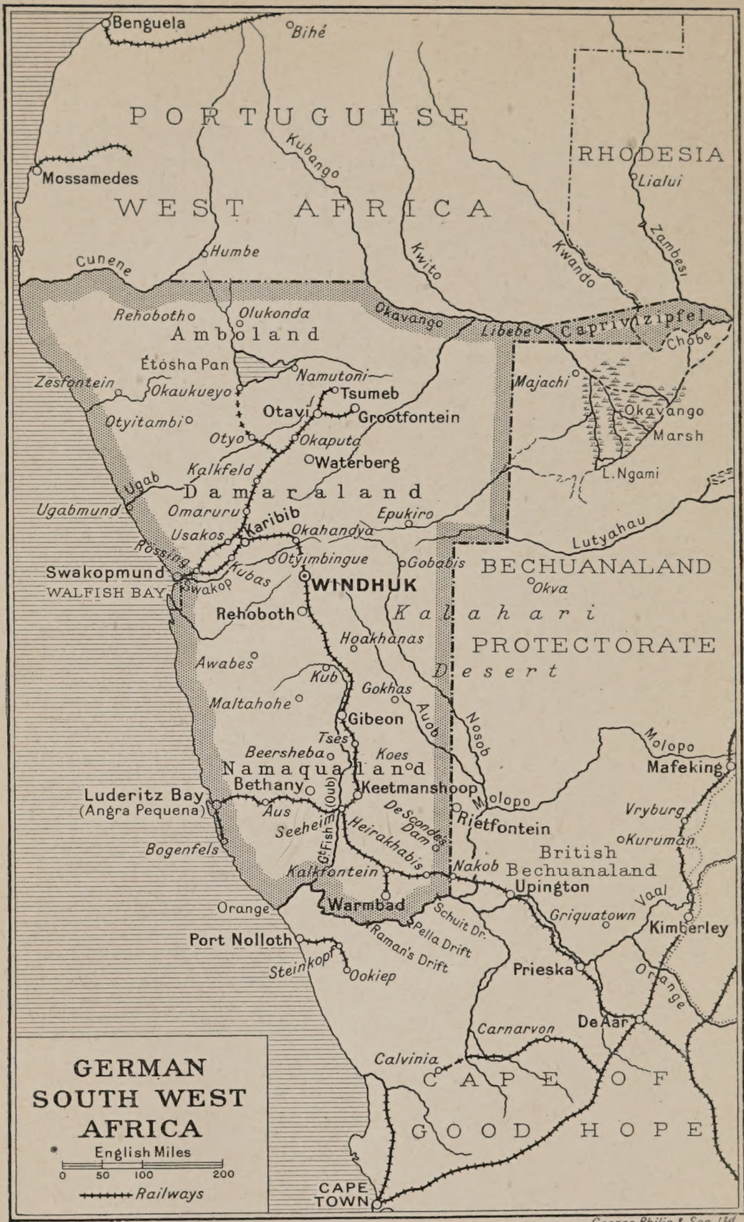
[1] See "The Capture of De Wet," by Philip Sampson (Edward Arnold), which contains a good account.

In the early dawn seventy men crept round the house; and De Wet and his companions woke to find themselves surrounded. They rushed out, but were met with the glint of the rifle barrels facing them from every point. Men could do no more. There, at that little farm in the desert, this master of escape was for the first time captured.

It had required a Botha to capture a De Wet!

CHAPTER XV

THE GERMAN WAR (1915)



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CHAPTER XV

THE GERMAN WAR (1915)

> "Our cry for cradled Peace, while men are still
> The three-parts brute which smothers the divine,
> Heaven answers :—Guard it with forethoughtful will,
> Or buy it : all your gains from war resign ! "
> —George Meredith.

After rebellion, the German War. Without rest or pause, Botha had no sooner suppressed the revolt in his own country than he resumed the interrupted invasion of German South-West.

German South-West Africa, a country nearly three times the size of the United Kingdom, fell as a Colony to Germany under the general European division of Africa that took place by consent in the eighties and the nineties of last century. It was with no hearty approval from Cape Colony that the Imperial Governmen handed over this great tract of country to Germany; and it was as a result of a protest from the Cape that that Colony was allowed to retain her hold over the one and only effective harbour in the centre of German South-West Africa—Walfisch Bay.

During the thirty years which had elapsed since

Germany secured her hold over this country she had spared no effort to provide her new Colony with the latest equipment of modern civilisation. She had spent in the course of those years no less than £50,000,000 on South-West Africa—on railways, wireless, mining machinery, and water supply. It was not an easy country to make fit for European habitation, for although it contains many rich and fertile tracts of land in the centre, those tracts are surrounded with an arid and inhospitable belt of desert, as if devised by nature as a defence for those who should have the courage to live there. Even the considerable mineral resources of South-West Africa—its copper and diamonds—lie in remote and difficult regions.

The purely mechanical side of this problem of settlement had been faced by Germany with characteristic industry and resourcefulness; and our invading armies were amazed at the perfection and ingenuity of the buildings and plant dumped down in that torrid and sterile land—machinery, buildings, irrigation-works. It was on the human side that the Germans had so dismally failed. In spite of the million sterling annually granted to German South-West Africa by the Imperial Government, it still remained the most sparsely populated Colony in the world. The total European population was still short of 15,000—less than one human being to two and a half square miles. Even the German inhabitants tended to drift into Cape Colony; and there was little love lost between the civilians and their military masters. The white Colonists appealed in vain to Berlin for those elementary rights of self-government which they saw in full development across the border. The free and spacious life of a Colony, such as we know it, was strangled in official regulations. It is a notable and remarkable fact that the majority of even those irreconcilable Boers who drifted into the German Colony after the South African War came back willingly into British territory, preferring the easy-going freedom of our rule to the pipe-clay rigidity of the Germans. The trail of militarism was best shown by the fact that even out of the 15,000 white inhabitants no fewer than 3,000 were soldiers or police.

But where German colonisation had chiefly here broken down was in its dealings with the blacks. Before the coming of the Germans this part of Africa had been inhabited by a tribe of the Bantu race called the Hereros, ruling over an inferior population of aboriginal Hottentots. There had been the usual incidents of sordid cunning and trickery between white man and black in the struggle for the possession of the land—incidents that have marked the early stages of nearly all European contact with inferior races. In such cases, let that nation which is without guilt throw the first stone. But the real trouble with the Germans was that, having once quarrelled with the blacks, they seemed unable to find any settlement short of extermination. Their war with the Hereros in the early twentieth century was, by admission of the Germans themselves, perhaps the worst of all the struggles which have marked the white man's claim to South Africa. It became gradually one monotonous tale of outrage and massacre. It absorbed the energies of 20,000 of the best German troops, and before the close became a matter of scandal and strife to the Reichstag. To achieve success, British help had to be called to the aid of German military power. The Cape Police were ordered by the Cape Government, at the request of Sir Edward Grey, to hand over Herero rebels who escaped across the border, and for this a British officer was decorated by the German Emperor.

The treatment of the Hereros brought a terrible Nemesis. For in the course of that war the German Colonists had largely crippled their own energies. In destroying the natives they had destroyed their only supply of labour. Already before the European War, the German Colony was languishing for the lack of the black workers whom they had so freely massacred a few years before.

Yet the Germans now looked forward to the British invasion with an amazing complacency. They had some reasons. Although few in numbers compared to the inhabitants of British South Africa, the Germans had the power of the desert and the sun to protect them. It was no easy venture to march an army into that vast waterless land through the fierce blaze of a South African summer; and it was freely prophesied by many wise persons even in South Africa that Botha would never return. It would, indeed, have been easy enough for a larger army than Botha's to have perished in that vast and homeless furnace, protected by every resource of the latest military art.

For there—in war-equipment—the Germans spared neither money nor scruple. Their army was provided with multitudes of the finest machine guns and the best artillery; the whole line of march along which the British advanced was sown with explosive mines of the most formidable character; the railways were wrecked; the wonderful wells sunk by German engineers in the dry river-beds were either destroyed or poisoned. It seemed impossible that troops could live in a land so devastated and armed with so much lurking death. No wonder that the German Staff looked forward with some serenity to the successful defence of South-West Africa against a foe thus to be met, and with a rebellion simmering in his rear.

But they had reckoned without a General whose motto was "swiftness" and an army that knew not the word "impossible." For in the remarkable campaign that now followed, Botha himself is the first to admit that he could not have succeeded without the wonderful troops under his command. He was not now hampered by the necessity of employing troops of one race only. For this war he put into force the full provisions of the Defence Act. He called for volunteers: and he found himself with a full complement of splendid fighters, some 50,000 men drawn from both races, composed equally of Dutch and British.

These were men who had learned to live hard and simple lives on farms in the open veldt, good shots and riders, inured to cold and heat, hardened to great fatigue, capable of prolonged thirst and hunger. They were ready for long forced marches on a few dry biscuits and a little "biltong"—soldiers who could learn to assuage thirst with a pebble, or drive off famine with a raisin—hard and tough men, devoted to their leader and sure of their cause. They were not, indeed, disciplined as Europe understands discipline; for they would talk to their officers as friends, and many of them would possess and pronounce their own opinions about strategy. To them Botha was just "Oom Louis," and Smuts was "Jannie." There would be strange moods among those commandos—times when Botha would have to go and temper the wind with smooth words. But what was lost in discipline was won back in individual alertness and intelligence—precious qualities in such a war. Those wonderful troops had a hundred eyes. They could see and feel water miles away; they learnt to know by the smallest surface signs where one of those deadly mines lay beneath the sand. It is due precisely to this development of individual skill and knowledge which Botha always encourages that so few lives were lost, and that only once did a German mine succeed in spreading "frightfulness" through the ranks of the South Africans.[1]

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[1] Total killed in the whole of this war, 88. Died of wounds, 25. Wounded, 311.

Botha's plan of campaign had the simplicity of all great military schemes. He divided his forces into three invading armies which were to march into South-West Africa from three different points—one concentrating from the southern border of the German Colony at Keetmans Hoop, and the other two advancing inland from the coast—Mackenzie from Lüderitzbucht, and Botha himself, with the northern force, from Swakopmund straight along the railway to the heart of the enemy at Windhuk. These armies were to converge, occupying the country as they advanced, and finally surrounding the main German army of occupation with an overwhelming superiority of force. For it is characteristic of Botha and a proof of his real military genius that he carries on the Napoleonic tradition of achieving victory by the concentration of numbers and power.

It was in the month of April, 1915, that the great advance began from all points. Once Botha moved he moved with a rapidity which upset all the calculations of the enemy. He himself with his army marched from the coast inland along the railway practically night and day, achieving in five days an amazing record of 190 miles over scorching desert. As he came on, the German troops, perplexed by the news of other advances from south and west, retreated rapidly, and the march soon became a chase. As Botha entered one end of the towns he would see the German rearguard leaving at the other; and so the movement went forward. On May 5 he entered the town of

Karibib, only to find the German army already flown. The German civilians had for the most part refused to join their army, and they showed little hostility towards the invader.[1]

In return the German civilians were treated with every kind of lenity and courtesy; for Botha believes with Henry V. that when men strive for a kingdom "the gentler gamester is the surer winner." At last, on May 12, without a check or break, Botha reached the capital city, Windhuk, and entered it in triumph. There he was joined by the armies from the south, and a few weeks were spent in refreshment and repair. The rapid mending of the railway behind them enabled Botha to refit his army and recruit his horses before the next advance.

At the end of June Botha set out again into the desert at the same breakneck speed. This time he marched northward, covering 120 miles in a week. Rapidly he drew near the German forces, who retreated further and further along the railway into the desert, putting up no resistance except an occasional skirmish. Advancing with superior numbers, Botha was able to outflank them every time they tried to make a stand. But they were not merely outnumbered; they were also again and again beaten in fair fight, by Manie Botha, by Wyburgh, Brits, Van de Venter, Mackenzie—all those remarkable leaders of men who seem to spring up freely from the soil of trust and confidence. Faced by these rapidly moving Afrikanders, the German troops proved too slow and mechanical even in retreat. The Boers walked round them.

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[1] See an excellent description of this march in "With Botha in the Field," by Moore Ritchie (Longmans, Green and Co.).

The end came far north at Tsumeb on July 9, 1915. The German Commander, Von Franke, still had 4,000 men with him and he was not wanting in courage. But he suddenly awoke to find that he was surrounded—not by the whole of Botha's army, but by a force smaller than his own. With one of those great strokes of the military art which seem to come instinctively from General Botha, he had sent General Brits for a detour of 200 miles through wild country to the rear of the Germans, and had blocked their retreat to the North. At the same time he sent General Wyburgh to the East and the two claws of the pincers almost met. A savage tribe eager to be revenged on the Germans, completed the circle. Franke had no choice—he must either perish or surrender.

It is narrated of General Botha that when he had secured the success of this movement and found the Germans within his power an onlooker suggested that instead of awaiting the surrender of the Germans he should destroy them by a concentrated gun fire. "No," said General Botha, "for we shall have to live with their people afterwards!" It was characteristic of him that, having the choice of peace or destruction, he preferred peace.[1]

Having once achieved the mastery he sought, Botha now softened the surrender for the German Army by terms that seem to Europe amazingly generous. The officers were allowed to retain their arms and to live on parole in such South African towns as they might select. The reservists were to surrender their arms, but having signed the parole were to be allowed to return to their homes and resume their civil occupations. All reservist prisoners of war were released on the same terms. Civil officials were to be allowed to remain in their homes provided they signed the parole. The rank and file were to be interned under proper guard, but were to be allowed to retain their rifles without ammunition. Botha had the immense advantage of remoteness from Germany, and could therefore run certain risks which are impossible to the Home Country. But it is clear that in these terms it was the statesman rather than the soldier who was speaking. Botha turned his back on "reprisals." He met "frightfulness" with mercy. He had in view the large and broad aim of achieving civil peace between all the white races of South Africa—including not only Dutch and English but also even Germans.

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[1] Cp. Tacitus. "They make a desert, and call it peace." (Solitudinem faciunt pacem appellant.)

Throughout this war Botha campaigned with the absolute simplicity of the old Boer. The travelling wagon, replete with modern comforts, prepared for him at Cape Town, was left behind; a magnificent tent constructed for him was never unpacked; he slept out both in good weather and bad; he lived like the simplest trooper in his own army. His only relaxations were auction bridge and chess; and instead of taking with him the French cook recommended he took "Malaboch," an old Cape "boy."

It was now time for Botha to return to his own country, where much remained to be done. He took ship again and was back in Pretoria by July 30. He came as a conquering hero, and it was a tremendous welcome that the Pretorians gave him. A crowd of over 12,000—a mighty gathering for South Africa—greeted the victorious soldier. He spoke to this people in straight and simple words. He was not ashamed to claim that he had done the right thing. "We took the more difficult course," he said, "and that was the road of honour, truth, and justice."

Then he put in a word for South-West Africa. The country had been ill spoken of and it was bad for campaigning. But it was a splendid country for settlement and farming; and he intended to setttle 10,000 of his own people there. "It is now British South-West Africa," he said, "and it must remain a Province of the Union." In those words he defined a policy that may still become of vital moment for the future of the world.

From the Transvaal he passed into the Free State and to Cape Colony, to Bloemfontein, and Stellenbosch; and at each great centre he received a triumphant welcome. In his speeches he gave all the praise to his soldiers; and he showed that he had lost none of that old Boer piety which had upheld him through the Boer War, and which he has never blushed to confess before men. "When you consider the hardships we met," he said—"the lack of water, poisoned wells, and land mines, and how wonderfully we were spared—you must realise and believe that God's hand protected us. It is due to His intervention that we are safe to-day!"

The time had now come for Botha to put his war policy to the test of public opinion. Under the South Africa Act it is laid down that there should be an election for the Assembly every five years; and the first term of five years had come to a close in November, 1915. It would not have been possible to postpone this election without passing a new Bill through the Imperial Parliament; and public opinion in South Africa was strongly bent upon observing the exact provisions of their great constitutional statute. Elections in our Colonies do not bring those great convulsions of society that we associate with General Elections in England. The quick one-day decision of a modern colonial democracy is a very different thing from our long-dragging national suspense. For his part, Botha welcomed the election—even in a country which had only just emerged from a rebellion. He regarded it as a safety valve from all the violent emotions accumulated during the last few months. He was not ashamed to vindicate his policy before the people. He has always had a great belief in his power of persuasion over the multitude. With consummate bravery he passed straight from the field, to face, unguarded, on the platform, the brothers and cousins of the men who had fallen in fighting against him. The risk was by no means small. There was at least one conspiracy to kill him; and General Smuts, his lieutenant, was actually received by pistol-shots when he appeared on the platform at Newlands, the suburb of Johannesburg.

General Botha fought this election with fierce and resolute energy. He realised that the future of South Africa depended on the result. It was a difficult and critical political situation he had to face. As leader of the South African party he was confronted by three rival organisations—the Unionists, the Nationalists, and the Labour Party. It was practically impossible that he should obtain a majority over all these groups. Fortunately for him, the Labour Party had been split in half by the war; some of them had entered upon the difficult and dubious course of "war against war"; others were following Mr. Cresswell in support of the Government policy. The Unionist Party under Sir Thomas Smartt had agreed to a truce; and in some districts a division of seats had been arranged between the Unionist and South African parties. The real fight was between the party of Botha and the party of Hertzog—the leader of the new Nationalists. This contest was fought throughout the country with great bitterness and violence. In many of the country districts meetings were broken up. Botha had to face the vitriolic virulence of that unbridled hatred which comes only from men who once were friends.

He "faced the music" with serene courage. He went into every part of the country and met his opponents. There were places in the back veldt where not a single politician could be found to take the chair for him. In such places Botha would become both his own chairman and his own orator. He never flinched from hecklers; and in that field of war, indeed, the Dutchman divides honours with the Scotchman.

The election took place on October 20, 1915; and Botha emerged with a following which put all the pessimists to rout. The South African Party in the new Assembly numbered 54, and was easily the largest party in the House. The Unionists numbered 40. The Labour Party secured only four seats; and the Independents five. The Nationalists emerged as a formidable group of 27. The election showed that their power was concentrated in the Free State, where Hertzog had swept the board. The voting power behind them was greater than the proportion of seats—77,000 as against 95,000 for the South African Party. Thus there was still an element of peril in the situation; but there could be no doubt that, with such a following, it was Botha's duty to continue his task as Prime Minister of the South African Union.

So at the close of 1915 Botha entered upon his second South African Premiership. Within a few months he had given the world another mark of his characteristic clemency by the release of De Wet; and during 1916 he had increased the obligation of the Mother Country by preparing the East African expedition. So we leave him, the African pillar of our Empire, bearing on his broad, humane shoulders the future hopes of British rule in that vast Continent.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MAN

CHAPTER XVI

THE MAN

"The duration of the lives of such men as these is to be determined, I think, by the length and importance of the parts they act, not by the number of years they pass between their coming into the world and their going out of it."
—BOLINGBROKE *on his "Chosen Men."*

STRONG in frame and substantial of build—as burly as that great Minister on whose size Elizabeth loved to jest[1]—Louis Botha is a living magnet to the affections of men. Statesman and soldier, South African Premier and British General, he would pass in a new country as a well-to-do farmer, with a great gift for friendship and kindly humour.

He can, indeed, be stern at need, and in battle terrible. But he prefers to rule by love rather than fear. To his followers he is just "Oom Louis"; to his troops Botha; to his children a brother; to his Cabinet a kindly father. He governs men by their hearts.

It is worth while before we leave him to form a picture of his life to-day in South Africa.

---

[1] "My Lord Burleigh, you are burly."

The new Parliament of the Union sits in Cape Town; the administration is carried on at Pretoria. Thus it is that Botha has to spend half the year by the sea at Cape Town, and the other half at Pretoria in the heart of the veldt country.

His life in Cape Town during the sittings of Parliament is strenuous enough, but it has its pleasant side.

The Session lasts from January to July—from the South African summer to the winter. During that period Botha has since 1910 lived outside the town at "Groote Schuur," the country mansion which, under Rhodes's will, now stands to South Africa as Downing Street[1] does to the Government of Great Britain.

"Groote Schuur," with its picturesque Dutch gables, its gorgeous summer-houses, its gardens glowing with all the tints of the South African hydrangeas, forms a splendid home for a Prime Minister. Its characteristic natural feature is the great open pillared verandah facing Table Mountain—a kind of glorified South African "Stoep." The verandah is richly furnished with tables, chairs, and sofas, and there any resident or visitor can live a delightful open-air life, so pleasant and easy in that clear and dry climate of South Africa, rarely too hot in summer or too cold in winter.

From this "Stoep" can be seen the gigantic memorial to Cecil Rhodes, far up the mountain, erected at the very spot where the "Colossus" used to spend his Sunday mornings dreaming and scheming. One looks down from that memorial, as Rhodes looked, on the far-spread city of Cape Town—with the distant twinkling waters of the Atlantic on one side and the blue mountains on the other.

---

[1] Left by Sir George Downing (1623–1684) in perpetuity to the First Ministers of the Crown, just as "Groote Schuur" has been left to the Prime Ministers of South Africa by Cecil Rhodes.

Standing there now we can think of those large and generous words that Botha wrote of Rhodes in August, 1912[1]:—

> "Criticism, at such a time as this, gives place to reverent and sincere appreciation of what was best and most unselfish in our friend: and the heart in reverence bows to the silent prayer that what was greatest and highest and noblest in Cecil Rhodes may remain a living influence in the country he loved so well."

There, in those words spoken after such bitter experiences, you have a reflection of the great and humane spirit of the speaker, always seeking for what is best in all men.

Botha has reason to feel and know the splendour of Cecil Rhodes's imagination. For in this house, "Groote Schuur," Rhodes lavished his great wealth with both hands—splendidly furnishing it and filling it with precious treasures—rare antique furniture and silver—old Dutch china, a great collection of pictures, and a gallery of tapestry worked with an emblematic allegory of peace and war.

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[1] His Foreword to the published edition of Earl Grey's speech on Cecil Rhodes at the dedication of the Memorial.

It is not a very big house. The reception rooms are large, but there are not more than twelve bedrooms. A remarkable feature is a marble bathroom which fills every visitor with admiration. It is an adapted sarcophagus, and so big that five people can bathe in it at once. There is a marble table at the side, and altogether it seems to embody one of those visions of splendid living which filled the minds of the later citizens of Imperial Rome.

In the gardens of "Groote Schuur" is a special "Zoo," filled with the animals which Cecil Rhodes collected from every part of the world, including the famous lions—one of the sights of Cape Town.

During the six months of residence in this house the Bothas freely entertain visitors to Cape Town. Both Dutch and English are equally welcome. The Bothas like to have the house full, and they are fond of sharing it with their friends. To the people it is a great show place, and from morning till night visitors from England and the world at large are wandering through its rooms. Here you meet the officers of an English man-of-war side by side with members of the Legislative Assembly from far Transvaal, all sorts and conditions. Mrs. Botha is always a charming hostess, and is ready to entertain all reasonable visitors from Dutch school teachers to English tourists and Girl Guides.

The one room which Mrs. Botha never opens to her guests is the bedroom of Cecil Rhodes. That room is kept exactly as it was in his lifetime—a people's tribute to the man who gave his house to the people.

The South African Parliament sits from two in the afternoon until twelve o'clock at night, and it shares with the Imperial House of Commons the unpleasant habit of all-night sittings. That being so, General Botha has often to come home very late at night from his work; but in spite of that he is a very early riser, and he is often to be seen sitting on the verandah reading his papers by six o'clock on the following morning.

Like all hard pressed men he is forced to live a very simple life. He used to smoke, although never excessively; but now he has had to give it up altogether. He is a practising, but not a professing, teetotaler, and refuses wine even at public banquets. His favourite drink on such occasions is lemon and plain water. He has a curious passion for sweets, which have probably taken the place of smoking in his case.

It is always a great trial for a man to transfer his energies from an active out-of-door life to the indoor mental existence of a brain worker. This is especially the case with a Boer, who belongs to the most out-of-door race in the world. When he was young, General Botha practically lived on horseback and in the fields; now he has been compelled to spend most of his time in the study and the Council Chamber. The first result was that he grew much stouter. He is now dieted, and is engaged in one of those anxious, strenuous, uphill fights against assailing adiposity which makes the whole middle-aged world kin. Like so many British statesmen he has taken to golf—another link with Empire! It is his frequent habit to motor out to his golf-course at five o'clock in the morning and to play until eight. He will do this even when Parliament has kept him sitting until after midnight—a striking proof of his immense physical energy. In very hot weather he sometimes varies this by motoring down to Muizenberg and taking a dip in the sea in the early morning. During his visit to England he greatly impressed an English Tennis Club at Hampstead by arriving for a game at six o'clock in the morning.

He reaped the reward of this physical steady self-discipline during the campaign in German South-West Africa. Throughout that campaign he had to ride, and he showed himself capable of extraordinary physical endurance. After a long day's ride he would be as fresh as any of his officers; and he wore out many horses in the course of the campaign.

He takes his duties with that grave systematic seriousness which is still a strong trait of the Dutch character at its best. He has the true public man's habit of putting public affairs first. But that is not to say that he will not unbend. On the contrary, no man is more ready to "rejoice with those who rejoice." For Botha is essentially of a jovial, good-humoured nature, although the calls upon him often make him very grave. But in the intervals of work he gives many dinner-parties, although he does not himself go much to the houses of others, but prefers to spend his free evenings at home. He has a desk in his bedroom at "Groote Schuur" where he writes many of his letters. He never goes to a theatre in South Africa. He will play cards or billiards with his family all the evening—take a drink of water, and then go to bed. He is, I believe, accounted a very good bridge-player by the best bridge-players of the Cape. Such are the lesser details of a greatly lived life.

Like many men with that broad, humane temperament of his, Botha has a special aversion from gossip. He will very quickly check personal remarks among the young people of his family. He loves to hear his children talk, but he is a remorseless foe of that very tempting and seductive form of light conversation which battens upon the smaller faults and failings of neighbours and acquaintances. This form of gossip brings from him a rapid and decisive rebuke. He is, perhaps, at his best when he is telling his war stories; but that is a rare mood with him and will come only when he is with intimate friends.

But, after all, perhaps the most characteristic picture of Botha is to be seen during the Recess, when he moves to Pretoria, the capital of his own province, and lives in his own house among his own people.

His home in Pretoria is just a big bungalow of the old Dutch type. At the Cape all his servants are white, but here at Pretoria he is waited upon by white and black. He has an old black servant named Asia. When the Boer War broke out it was proposed that Asia should stay behind; but Asia refused. "If Baas goes to the war," said the faithful black servant, "Asia goes too. If Baas gets killed, Asia gets killed too." The two came home alive, although Botha had a horse killed under him and several times narrowly escaped death. Asia was duly promoted to be Botha's coachman.

Black servants are not always quite adapted to the civilised usages of public life. The story is told that when Lord and Lady Selborne called on Botha at Pretoria at the beginning of his Premiership, Mrs. Botha ordered tea, but no tea came. When after a time Mrs. Botha sought the reason, she found that it was because the Kaffir girls had given the tea to the Governor's lackeys, whom they judged by their costume to be the real rulers of South Africa.

At Pretoria, Botha lives in far less "state" than at Cape Town. His evenings are less occupied, and he is able to see more of his own family. Like most Boers, Botha is devoted to his family, and he would be very unhappy if any of his children forgot to come and give him a good-night kiss. He is very fond of his grandchildren.

His study at Pretoria is decorated with some fine prints of Napoleon, whose campaigns he has, of course, carefully studied. For his public correspondence he has that admirable secretary, Dr. Bok, who has been his confidential adviser ever since he has been Prime

Minister. But there are many things he keeps to himself and many letters he writes with his own hand. Botha never forgets that he is head of the great party as well as Prime Minister. The South African Party is closely organised, and Botha has party agents in every district; but he never leaves affairs entirely to agents, and he makes a rule of visiting a number of constituencies each vacation time.

We must not think of these small, close-knit Governments in our Dominions as being in any relation of size to our Government at home. The first thing that strikes a visitor to any of the great Colonies is the homeliness and friendliness of politics. The circle is so much smaller. I can remember arriving in Montreal from England with a bare note of introduction to Sir Wilfrid Laurier, presenting my note, and dining with him the same evening in the public room at the Windsor Hotel. In London all that would have taken at least a week. Similarly, in Pretoria all the Ministers meet one another several times every day. The Government offices are all in one building and frequently all lunch together. That makes it much easier for a Prime Minister to keep his Cabinet united.

In Pretoria, as in Cape Town, the Bothas keep open house, and their life is still half-public. Their real intimate private life is lived during their holidays, which they spend at "Rusthof," their farm near Standerton in the Transvaal. Standerton was Botha's first constituency under the Transvaal Constitution of 1906, and he is thoroughly at home there. There he becomes the Boer farmer. He lives a happy domestic life with his wife and such of his children as are not yet detached from home by other calls.[1]

Dutch is his domestic language, and he generally speaks Dutch in public. But he speaks English in Natal, and he is willing to speak English anywhere by special request. The only difficulty is that he has to write his speeches in English before he delivers them. He is always willing to have his speeches repeated or summarised in either Dutch or English according to the need. When we remember that he can also talk Zulu and Sesuto it becomes fair to say that General Botha is a considerable linguist.

But it is not the accomplishments that make the man—it is the inherited, habitual trend of character. There we come back to the fact that Botha is before all things a countryman, brought up on the land and loving nothing better than the land. Contact with mother earth seems to have given him some of the large serenity and sane endurance of nature herself. A strange fortune has taken him by the hand and led him to places of great pomp and power. Still, in his moments of leisure he loves to throw off the robes of State and to become the farmer once more. He feels

> "A distant dearness in the hill
> A secret sweetness in the stream."

He is never happier than when he is riding about his lands on his country farm. For, as we have seen in so many episodes of his career, he ever loves peace and ensues it; and that is a great piece of luck for South Africa. For there are great temptations attaching to that genius for war which Botha possesses. The coming of such men into the world—men gifted with that rare power of mastery in the field of violence which men call generalship—has not always been a blessing for the country that has produced them. They possess a power against which there seems no appeal. Fortunate, then, is humanity when the possessor of such skill employs it only for great humane ends, and himself fixes a limit to his own awful power. To that class of warrior Botha emphatically belongs.

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[1] His eldest daughter has married and is now Mrs. De Waal. His eldest boy was aide-de-camp in the German campaign.

In his peaceful ventures he has been prosperous. The farm at Vryheid destroyed in the war—the "Waterval"—was a famous establishment. There he indulged in his passion for trees, and he rejoiced in planting avenues of silver wattle, a very beautiful growth. He laid out at Vryheid a large agricultural show ground, and he made a great deal of money as the district grew. He was then, as now, a great judge of stock, especially of sheep, and on his various visits to England he made a special point of choosing specimens of the best British breeds to strengthen and improve the South African cattle after the war. In every respect, indeed, his interest in farming has been of great value to his country; for it has led him, as Minister of Agriculture, to make great and important efforts for the improvement of what must be, in the end, the really enduring industry of South Africa.

It is probably his up-bringing on the land which has made Botha so patient and good-tempered under criticism, and has given to his character its permanent background of large tolerance and generosity. Woven into this background is all the shrewdness and "slimness" of a man who knows the great world; and it is this combination of contrasting qualities that gives to his character its real distinction. A master of war and politics, he yet talks to the people in the vernacular of their own beloved "Taal," and uses their own homely Dutch proverbs. "No man accuses another of hiding behind the door to listen unless he has been there himself"—is a good specimen of such familiar lore of the old Dutch. When Hertzog thought to improve relations between the races by talk about the possible treachery of the British rule, Botha remarked: "He reminds me of a man on his honeymoon telling people what he would do if his wife became unfaithful to him." It would be difficult to improve on the comparison.

But it is not only from Mother Earth that Botha draws his strength. It is also from those earlier races which are the human soil of South Africa. He undoubtedly owes much to his lifelong knowledge and observation of the natives of South Africa. Those who have watched him much in Parliament observe that he is very slow to reply. He prefers allowing all his critics to exhaust themselves before he reveals his defence. This was one of the favourite habits of those remarkable men, the old native African chiefs, who carried on the last long fight against the invading white man—men like Cetewayo and Lobengula. It is probable that Botha in his early days learnt much of his ready power of expression and skill in argument from listening to the talk of those admirable debaters of the black race.

But behind it all is the Dutchman, full of shrewd proverbs and excellent Veldt similes—" of wise saws and modern instances "—of pawky familiar strokes of humour that put him at ease with his audiences and blunt the edge of wrath with laughter.

The astonishing thing is, of course, that Botha combines with all this such high ideals of honour and principle; and it is even more remarkable that with so little education he has such immense influence over educated men. Such miracles of character often put to shame the pride of the schools. But in Botha's case he has the advantage, which high character so often secures, of being surrounded by intellectual helpers. There is, for instance, Mrs. Botha, his gifted and highly-educated helpmate—his parliamentary Lieutenant, Smuts, the finest flower of an English University—his keen and clever secretary, Dr. Bok—and last, but not least, his well-educated children—all these are helping Botha to meet his enemies in the gate.

Then we come again to another phase of the old contrast in his character—that with all his instincts for war, Botha is an exceptionally humane man. During his youth he shot a great deal. Like most of the young Boers he delighted to hunt and shoot types of antelope known in South Africa as "Buck"; and without doubt this sport taught him a great deal of the elements of war. But in later life he has lost his love of shooting, and very rarely indulges it. Perhaps because he has seen so much life taken in anger, he now finds little pleasure in the taking of life in sport.

With all these contradictions, Botha is just a great piece of astounding good fortune for the British Empire; and perhaps it is precisely the contradictions that make him so big a piece of fortune. Governing a mixed population of English and Dutch, he is always being blamed by both parties; and that is perhaps the best proof that he is working on the right lines. Standing between the races, he cannot expect to have the hearty enthusiastic support of either; for the entire support of one would mean the entire enmity of the other. But it takes no ordinary man to stand the fret of constant blame. There have been times in Botha's life when even his strong spirit has seemed to bend beneath the burden. There was a moment after his defeat at East Pretoria in 1910 when a great fatigue seemed to seize him; and for a long time after that misfortune, Botha's health was bad. For beneath it all he is a sensitive man; and his endurance must not be mistaken for callousness. But he has found, as so many men find in such a position, that enduring victory is to be sought only through the power of accepting defeat without being defeated.

The wishes of all men of good heart will go out to

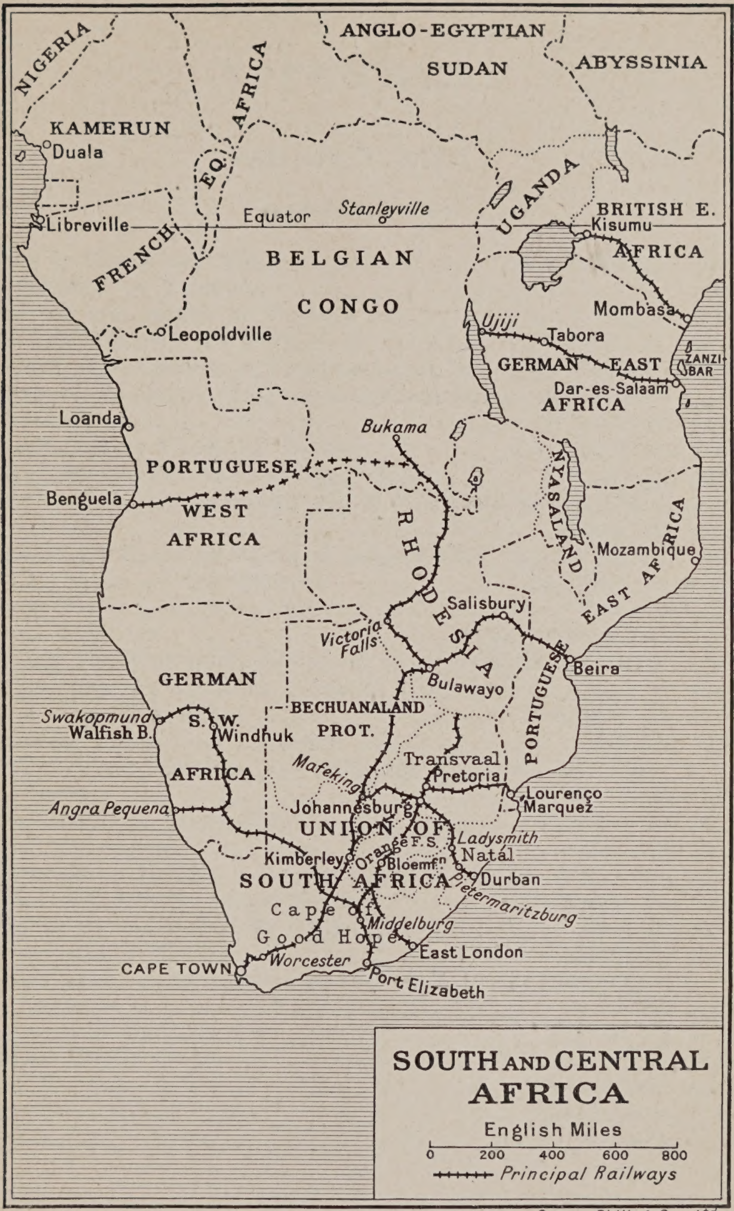
General Botha in his great task. For they see him, in a country harassed and devastated by wars, standing steadily for unity and peace. To the vast, multitudinous confusion of races and colours that makes up South Africa, he preaches steadily and calmly that the only secret of future well-being lies in mutual tolerance and forgiveness. Such a gospel at such a moment shines star-like, "like a good deed in a naughty world."

In glancing back over the life of the modern world, there are several figures recalled by the career of Botha. Conspicuously, there is Washington, the victorious soldier who combined skill in war with modesty and public spirit, and who after a great war helped to lead the people to a larger unity.

But an even more striking parallel is that of William III., the great Dutch King who ascended the throne of Great Britain. He, too, was called in middle life from his own people to rescue another's country from the hell of civil war, and to rule over men of another tradition and another tongue. He, too, had to bring into harmony the men of those two races, the English and the Dutch, who have not always loved one another so dearly because they are so near akin. With William III., as with Botha, his Dutch followers accused him of preferring England, and his English subjects denounced his Dutch friends. Both had to deal with extremists on either side—William III. with Jacobites who wanted to restore the old dynasty, Botha with Nationalists who have craved after the old Republics. Both have had to strike a compromise; and a compromise has few friends. Both have suffered defeat; both have drawn out of defeat victory. Both have been men sparing in words, but strong in deeds.

The same aim and object have been placed before both, to draw two sundered races together.

Only one thing remains to make the parallel complete. William III. succeeded. As they have proved alike in so much else, is it not probable that these two men—these two great Dutchmen who have both wielded the British power—will in this also prove alike?



SOUTH AND CENTRAL AFRICA

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APPENDIX I

BOTHA'S LIFE

PRINCIPAL DATES

Born at Greytown, Natal	September 27, 1862
Expedition to Zululand	1884
Married and settles in Vryheid	1885
Becomes member for Vryheid in Transvaal Volksraad	1895
Goes on active service as Field Cornet in Boer War	October, 1899
Becomes Assistant Commandant-General of the Transvaal	November, 1899
Commands at Battle of Colenso	December 15, 1899
Saves the day for Boers at Spion Kop	January 24, 1900
Becomes Commandant-General of Transvaal on Joubert's death	March 27, 1900
Commands Boers at Battle of Berg-en-dal	August 25–27, 1900
Wins Battle of Bakenlaagte	October 30, 1900
Signs Peace at Vereeniging	May 31, 1902
Visits England	July-November, 1902
Founds Het Volk and agitates for responsible Government	1905
Responsible Government given to Transvaal	1906
First General Election	February 20, 1907
Becomes Premier of Transvaal	March, 1907
Visits Great Britain as Delegate to Imperial Conference	July, 1907
Attends Union Convention	October 12, 1908
Draft Act signed	May 11, 1909
Visits Great Britain to secure assent to Union Act	July, 1909
Union Act receives Royal Assent	December 20, 1909
Premier of South African Union	May 31, 1910
First General Election	September, 1910
Visits Great Britain again as Delegate to Imperial Conference	May, 1911
Returns to South Africa	August 29, 1911
Indian Coolie Crisis	1912
The Hertzog Split	November, 1913
The Great Rand Strike	July-August, 1913
The Railway Strike	January, 1914

Deports Labour Leaders	January 27, 1914
Puts down Rebellion in British South Africa	October and November, 1914
De Wet Captured	December 2, 1914
Invaded German South-West	April, 1915
Surrender of German Army	July 19, 1915
Returns to South Africa	July 30, 1915
Wins Second General Election	October 20, 1915
Premier of South African Union for second time	November, 1915

APPENDIX II

THE DINIZULU AGREEMENT

PROCLAMATION.

To all who may see or hear this read—Salute.

I, Dinizulu, King of the Zulus and of Zululand, with the advice and counsel of my chief Ministers and Headmen and of William Grant as my representative and adviser,

PROCLAIM

by these presents make known that I, with my Ministers and Headmen before mentioned, have given in full and free possession to a certain number of South African Boers in Zululand, certain portion of Zululand bordering on the South African Republic and the Reserve, to the extent of approximately one million three hundred and fifty-five thousand morgen [1] of ground, with the right to establish there an independent Republic under the name of

THE NEW REPUBLIC,

and I proclaim further that henceforth the remaining portion of Zululand and the Zulu nation shall be subject to the control of the Executive Council of the said New Republic.

Given under my hand at Hlobane in the New Republic on this 16th day of August, A.D. 1884.

(Mark ×) DINIZULU.
WILLIAM GRANT.

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[1] A morgen = 2 acres.

PROCLAMATION.

Be it known to all who may see or hear this read, that I, Lukas Johannes Meyer, acting President of the New Republic. with the advice and counsel of the Executive Council, and by virtue of Resolution of the Volksraad of this date, and with the voluntary consent and at request of Dinizulu, King of the Zulus and Zululand, and his chief Ministers and Headmen, hereby

PROCLAIM

and make known the protectorate of the New Republic over the whole of the territory comprising the kingdom of King Dinizulu.

All powers and persons are requested to take cognisance of this Proclamation and to conduct themselves in accordance therewith.

God preserve the land and people.

Given under my hand at Hlobane, in the New Republic, on this sixteenth day of August, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and eighty-four.

L. J. MEYER, *Acting President.*
D. J. ESSELEN, *Acting States Attorney.*

APPENDIX III

THE TREATY OF VEREENIGING (1902)

THE governing clauses of this Treaty, which at present regulates the relations between Great Britain on the one side and the Transvaal and Orange Free State on the other, run as follows :—

"1. The burgher forces in the field will forthwith lay down their arms, handing over all guns, rifles, and munitions of war in their possession or under their control, and desist from any further resistance to the authority of His Majesty King Edward VII, whom they recognise as their lawful sovereign. The manner and details of this surrender will be arranged between

Lord Kitchener and Commandant-General Botha, Assistant Commandant-General De la Rey, and Chief Commandant De Wet.

* * * * *

"5. The Dutch language will be taught in public schools in the Transvaal and Orange River Colony where the parents of the children desire it, and will be allowed in courts of law when necessary for the better and more effectual administration of justice.

* * * * *

"7. Military administration in the Transvaal and Orange River Colony will at the earliest possible date be succeeded by Civil Government, and, as soon as circumstances permit, representative institutions, leading up to self-government, will be introduced."

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